



Hearriet L Knapp

MIRIAM'S TOWER

BY

HARRIET LORETTA KNAPP



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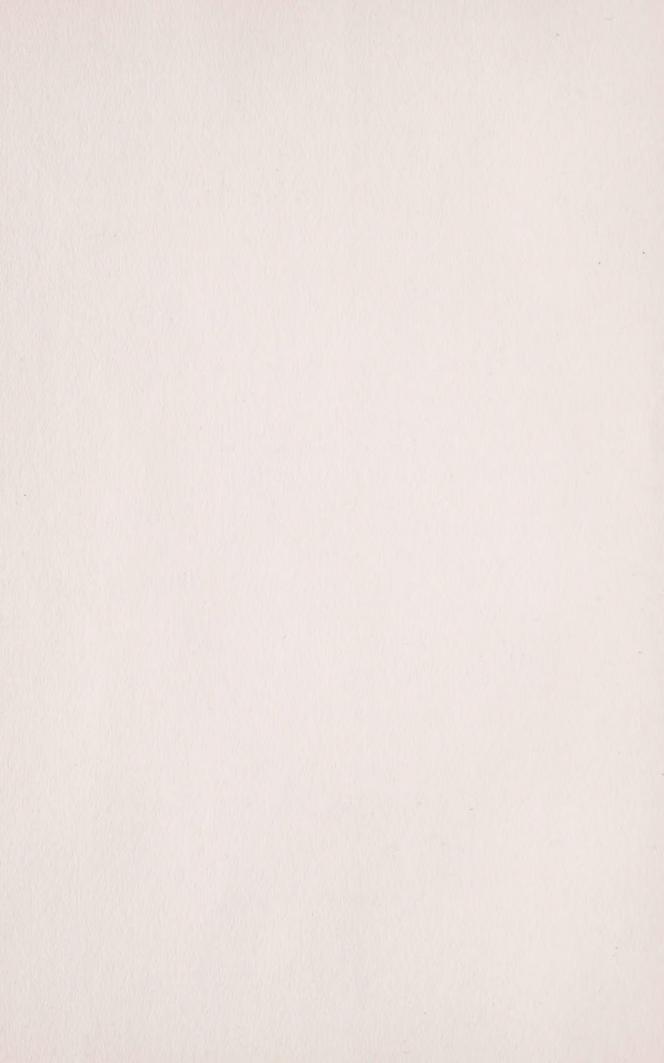
SECOND EDITION

TO MY HUSBAND

I DEDICATE

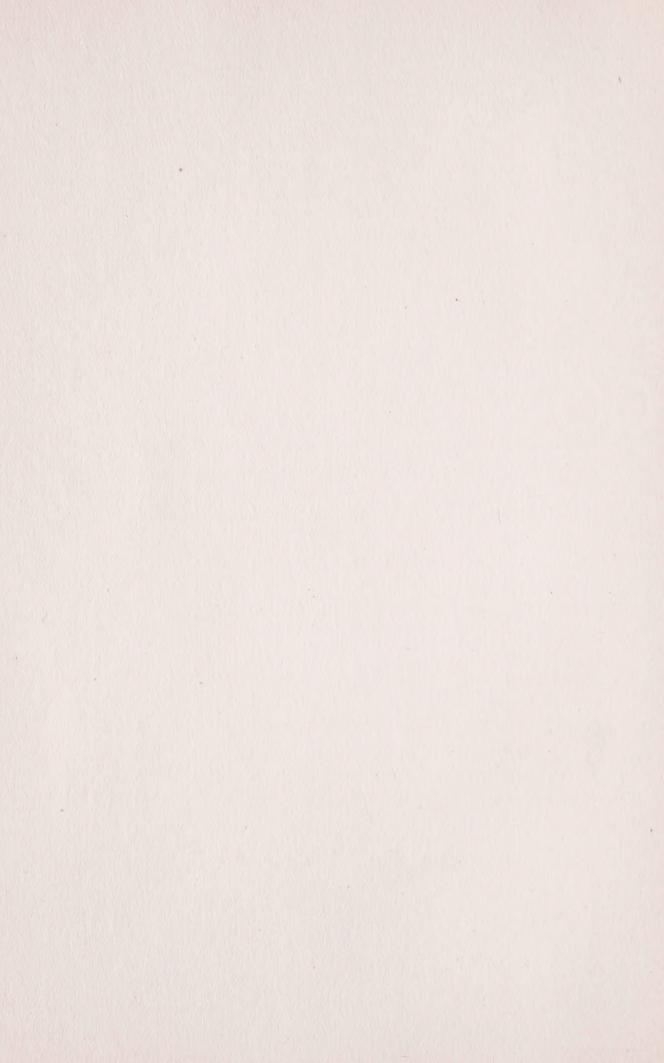
THIS, MY FIRST BOOK.

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MIRIAM.

Her smile is like a flash of sunlight on a placid lake; Her song, like music of the birds, at dawn when they awake; Her ears caressed by tresses dark, are like the pink sea shells:

And her infrequent laughter like the chimes of silver bells.

'Tis those she loves, who from her voice catch the accents tender;

And only those, who see, full orbed, her dark eyes' purple splendor.

Her slender form—her airy form, is fraught with matchless grace,

There is a charm—a nameless charm, in her fair girlish face;

Pensive her face, when in repose, and often chased away By sadness, are the dimples that around her lips would play.

Her star-bright eyes look shyly, out through their crisp dark lashes

In sudden joy her proud, sweet face lights up with radiant flashes.

- Her white soul looks serenely from the depths of her dark eyes,
- Those wondrous eyes that long to catch a glimpse of paradise,
- An earthly paradise, whose bowers and fields stretch out to meet
- The Elysian Fields and fadeless bowers, where winds the golden street.
- As her spirit eyes peer through the veil they oft behold a vision,
- Through gates ajar, that stand before the fields that are Elysian.



MIRIAM

MIRIAM'S TOWER.

CHAPTER I.

MIRIAM'S TOWER.

IN a little tower, in the midst of a shady garden, lived dark-eyed Miriam with two faithful companions. Miriam was the last of her race; and the little tower, the ivy-grown ruins, and the small garden was all that was left to her of the broad acres and magnificent chateau of her ancestral home. The garden was surrounded by a low wall. The grass was like velvet, in the shade of the wide-spreading elms. The graveled walks were bordered with flowers—marguerites, forget-me-nots, pansies and lilies-of-the-valley, and a white rose bloomed close to the southern wall. It was not a sunny garden; but a few rays of sunlight could penetrate the interlacing branches of the trees, but it was a quiet retreat and always cool and pleasant.

The tower was of gray sandstone, half covered with ivy. It contained but four rooms, one above the other. Each room had four windows and be-

neath each window was a balcony. Miriam loved the upper rooms the best. On the third floor was a loom, where, every day, like the "Lady of Shalott," she could be seen with her magic shuttle, bright with silken threads, weaving beautiful pictures into the warp and woof. In one corner of the room stood a harp of antique workmanship. No one could play this harp but Miriam and none but she could understand its wild, sweet melodies. And whether at loom or harp, from the time-stained walls, the pictured faces of her ancestors were ever looking down upon her, and of all this race of fair women and noble men, none were left but little Miriam.

The upper room was her parlor and library. Upon the polished floor were rich old rugs in queer designs. The silken hangings were worn and faded but still beautiful. Upon the walls were a few rare pictures of Madonnas and the cherub faces of little children. In Miriam's library were many strange old books; these were her treasures; books of ancient lore, dream books, mythologies, and old romances and poems quaintly written. Her guitar was there and her zithern, and her sewing stand with its little baskets of dainty needlework. It was a charming room, up among the tree-tops, but when sweet Miriam was there, all else was forgotten; and when absent, her personality pervaded the room like the perfume of invisible flowers.

The tower was surrounded by scenes most fair. From the northern balcony, Miriam's eyes could

penetrate the dim recesses of an old, old forest. From the southern balcony she could look upon fields of waving grain and sunny pastures where the cattle grazed; and just beyond was a chain of purple hills. She longed to know what was beyond the hills, and pictured scenes fairer than any she had yet beheld.

From the eastern balcony she looked down upon a placid lake, reflecting the sunlit sky by day, and at night the stars lay like gems upon its bosom. Beyond the lake was a walled city, she could catch the glint of its shining spires and turrets, and hear the faint music of the distant bells, and she would say: "Some day I will visit this wonderful city. Oh, the beautiful, unexplored future! It is mine, it is mine!"

She visited oftenest and lingered longest upon the western balcony. The scene was dreamy and mysterious; it filled her soul with strange longings. On either side of a broad white path, were rows of stately poplars, and, at the end of its narrowing vista, was a park. When the sun was shining, she could catch the gleam of marble forms and the glimmer of the fountain's spray; and at night it was full of little flashing lights, like shooting stars, all brightly colored. And on the western breeze was wafted faint strains of music, with a delicate perfume that no flower of her garden yielded.

Beyond this park, enveloped in misty splendor, there arose on shining heights, white castles and stately towers, half hidden in groves of feathery palms. She only caught a glimpse of this wondrous scene, when, for an instant, the mists that hovered o'er it were lifted, like a silvery curtain. She saw that none but lovers strolled along this broad white path, and they often parted before they reached the park; both turning back, one going to the right and the other to the left; many entered the park, some ascending the heights; others wandering there for a season returned, but always alone. When she asked her companions about the park and the heights they answered: "We cannot tell you but perhaps some day you will know; but seek not to know, little one. Why do you visit the western balcony so often, have you not three others?"

O, those calm, untroubled days! How tenderly she recalled them in after years. The valley was so fair and peaceful. How pleasant it was to stroll with her gentle companions across the daisystarred fields, off toward the purple hills, or down by the lake, where they would sit for hours watching the white skiffs gliding over the waters. And they never tired of gazing across at the glittering towers and parapets of the great city, and wondering what manner of people dwelt there, and what kind of lives they were living. They often spent the long summer afternoons in the old woods. This was the spot that Miriam loved best. She gazed with awe upon the great trees, the monarchs of the forest. To her the long shady paths were cathedral aisles, and the songs of the birds

in the leafy arches were sweet anthems chanted by invisible choirs, and the woods were full of mysterious voices that whispered beautiful tales in her ears. These tales were often of love, the miracle that had not yet been wrought in her.

One day as she was leaving the forest in the early twilight, she saw a man standing with bared head, looking up at the trees. As she passed, he caught the look of dreamy tenderness in her dark eyes. "Ah!" said he, "she knows how to love; to be loved by such as she would be heaven." And he followed her, afar off, until he saw her enter the garden where stood the little tower.

That night her dreams were troubled; and the next morning when her companions saw her, pale and listless, and anxiously asked the cause, she answered with a shiver: "I had such a terrible dream last night. What can it mean? My dreams of the night, like my day-dreams, have always been sweet and pleasant. I will tell you my dream, then perhaps it will trouble me no more:"

MIRIAM'S DREAM.

"In my dream, I entered a large park where a vast crowd of people were assembled together. They were restless, eager, expectant of—I know not what. It was evening, and the park was brilliantly lighted. But suddenly there was a shock as of a mighty earthquake; the lights went out, and we

were enveloped in inky blackness, not darkness, but dense blackness. There was an exclamation of horror that seemed to come as of one voice from the great assembly, and I felt the shudder that passed like an electric current from heart to heart, then all was silent; it was as the silence of death; and I seemed to stand alone in the chaos of ages past, before the Creator had said, 'Let there be light.' As these thoughts passed through my mind, there appeared in the western sky a dazzling circle of light, in which were waving and beckoning hands, black, skinny hands with long, bony fingers, and beautiful hands, white and jeweled. The skeleton hands beckoned me wildly and threateningly. The beautiful hands waved me back gently but earnestly. The strange vision lasted but a moment. When I awoke, cold and trembling; the moonlight lay silvery white across my casement and out in the calm night I heard the drowsy trill of a little bird, and I grew warm and ceased to tremble as these words came to me: 'I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for Thou, O Lord! makest me to dwell in safety!" After a moment of silence, Miriam said to her companions: "I have told you my dream, can you give me the interpretation thereof?"

And Peace answered, "I think that I can interpret your dream. I fear that some evil threatens you. The skeleton hands are the hands of your evil genius beckoning you on to meet this evil. The white hands are the hands of your good angel

waving you back from the evil that threatens you."

- "My sister has interpreted the dream aright," said Content.
- "You are my good angels," answered Miriam cheerfully, "when you are near no evil can befall me."

CHAPTER II.

THE ELYSIAN FIELDS.

WHENEVER Miriam left her garden, the stranger that she met in the edge of the woods was sure to appear. He haunted the woods, he haunted the shore of the beautiful lake and the fields where the daisies grew. Her companions watched him with troubled hearts, and when they warned her to beware of him, she would caress them and say:

"I am safe and happy with you. I will stay within my garden walls and look upon his face no more."

But from her balcony she often saw him wandering in her accustomed haunts, and on starlit nights he sang love-songs beneath her balcony, and her heart was thrilled with this strange new melody.

One morning when Miriam was walking in her garden he came, this lover, to whom she had never spoken, opened the gate and walked boldly in, and standing before her, he said:

"Come with me, my little love; come with me to the Elysian Fields."

"Where are the Fields Elysian?" she asked.

He pointed to the broad white path and said:

"That leads to the Fields Elysian. Come, I have the golden key that unlocks the gate. I will lead you through all the flowery paths of this won-

derful park and up to the Shining Heights that are called Love's Consummation."

As he drew her toward the gate, remembering her dream and the warning of her companions, she withdrew her hands from his clasp and said:

"I cannot go with you. Tempt me no more."

She then turned away, not trusting herself to listen to his pleadings. As she entered the tower, Peace and Content clasped her in their arms and said:

"Be careful little one, trust not the stranger."

After that, for many days, Miriam stayed within her tower walls, or, if she walked in the garden, her companions were with her. But one moonlight night her lover sang beneath her balcony; his heart was in his voice and her heart responded to the song. The next morning when he entered the garden, he found Miriam alone.

"Come, my love," said he, "the morning is very fair, come just a little way down the white path and listen to the music."

She hesitated, but the morning was so beautiful and his voice so tender and persuasive, that she could resist no longer, so she went with him, just far enough to catch the strains of heavenly music and scent the perfumes of the flowers, then hurried back to her tower.

Every day he came, and each morning she went with him a little farther and a little farther down the broad, white path. The Elysian Fields grew more and more beautiful as she approached them, and the music became more and more ravishing. But it was the music of his voice, his words of love that thrilled her soul. At last, one morning, they reached the gate and he held the golden key in his hand and said:

"Now, my love, I will show you all the beauties of the Fields Elysian. Look at the ripening fruits hanging low upon the trees; look at the great white lilies and the crimson roses; come I will gather them for you, then together we will ascend the Shining Heights."

As she listened to his words and beheld the beauty of the park her heart was filled with longings inexpressible. But as he unlocked the gate she drew back affrighted and stood looking at him, pale and trembling.

"I must go back," she said, "all these years I have been safe and happy in my little tower with my faithful companions; they are ever kind and gentle. Perhaps you will not always be kind, you may tire of your little Miriam and forsake her."

Then he took a solemn oath, swearing that he would never forsake her, and calling upon the gods to witness his oath.

Then he clasped her in his arms and kissed her and all doubts and fears fled before that first kiss. He unlocked the gate and with eager steps they entered the Fields Elysian.

Time sped on iris-hued wings as they wandered through mazy windings, listening to the music of invisible orchestras; lingering by the fountains and gathering the flowers and golden fruits, as they drew nearer and nearer to the Shining Heights.

The tower and the garden were forgotten by Miriam; all the past had become dim in the rapturous joy of this new existence. But one day a little cloud appeared, to mar the azure beauty of the sky and when she said to her lover regretfully:

"There is a cloud in our beautiful sky," he swept his eyes across the heavens and answered, "It is only a little cloud."

But the next day other clouds appeared and when Miriam again expressed her regret he said carelessly:

"The clouds are as natural as the sunshine."

She shivered at his words, then he caressed her and the clouds were forgotten. But the following day a heavy cloud obscured the sun.

And she said, "O, my love, the cloud is very black to-day!"

And he answered, coldly, "This life is not all sunshine."

At his words a flash of lightning shot athwart the sky followed by the sound of distant thunder.

Then she clasped his arm and cried in pleading accents, "Oh, my love, let us hasten to the Heights before the storm bursts upon us; see the little winding path is near, we can soon reach the shelter of the white castle, the beautiful white castle within the silvery mists."

"We need not hasten," said he, "the storm is afar off."

Miriam said no more but with sinking heart she watched the face she loved growing cold and hard beneath her gaze. They lingered at the foot of the Heights until the sun sank like a ball of fire behind the castle walls, flooding the silvery mist with crimson and gold; and, as the wind moaned through the trees and the lightnings played around the lofty turrets, the false one spoke and these cruel words pierced the heart of Miriam:

"All is ended now; I am weary of the Elysian Fields. I have lost my desire to ascend the Heights. Your reproachful glances move me not. I have given you joys that you could not have tasted but for me. It was I who carried the golden key that unlocked to you all these pleasures that were to you unknown. I have even made it possible for you to see the Shining Heights in all their splendor. I have given you much and robbed you of nothing. You still have your tower, your garden and the companions you loved so much. Now you can go back to them, you will not lose your way if you keep your eyes fixed upon the little tower that you were so loath to leave."

"But your broken promises," she cried, "your broken vows, what of them? Oh, my love, my love, do not forsake me."

But he heeded not her cry. And as he walked away a black shadow glided out from the gathering gloom and followed him; and, as she stood in dumb agony looking after his retreating form, these words fell from her white lips:

"The black shadow is the ghost of my dead happiness, and it will follow you, O my false love! until you come back to me."

All through that black tempestuous night Miriam lay prone upon the wet turf where her destroyer had left her, unmindful of the storm that beat upon her slender form, so much fiercer was the storm raging within her heart. When the morning dawned all was calm. The sunlight and the singing birds seemed to mock her misery. She arose from the wet turf and gave one last despairing look at the Shining Heights, then turned her face toward the east and dragged her weary form back through the paths where she so lately roamed with her false lover, then so beautiful, now so dreary.

She kept her eyes fixed upon the little tower and as she drew near, a faint ray of hope penetrated her sad heart and, hastening forward she said,

"I still have my tower, my garden of sweet flowers and my beloved companions. How grieved they will be for poor Miriam; what words of comfort will fall from their sweet lips and how tenderly they will take me in their arms and soothe me; but they can never heal my broken heart."

The sun had set before she reached the tower. When she opened the gate she found the garden filled with weeds instead of flowers and the vines hung black and dead upon the walls of the tower. Her heart was filled with terror when the door yielded not, as she raised the latch.

Then she rapped, calling loudly, "Open, open to me, my dear ones. It is your little Miriam come back to you. Your poor little Miriam, forsaken and alone."

Then the door was opened cautiously and a gaunt figure stood looking at her with firey eyes.

"Come in, Miriam," said a gruff voice, "I am to be your companion now, my name is Despair. The white birds have flown, you will see Peace and Content no more."

Then Miriam rushed past the grim figure and up the winding stairs to her room, once so pleasant, now so desolate. All night she lay upon the floor cold and motionless and Despair stood at the threshold brooding over her. And in the gray dawn of the morning he approached her and said:

"Arise, Miriam, arise! and I will show you a remedy for your woe!"

She arose and said, "A remedy, did you say? for this anguish, for this horrible heartache? O tell me the remedy without delay." Then Despair grasped her little cold hand in his burning palm and drew her out on the balcony.

"Hurl yourself to the ground, Miriam," said he, "and all will be ended."

Shrinking from him in horror, she answered, "I dare not take my life, it is not mine to destroy; it belongs to Him who gave it."

"But your life is spoiled," said Despair, "what are you going to do with the dreary years that are before you? You will never find Peace and Content and your false lover will come back to you no more. You have nothing to live for, end it now by flinging yourself to the ground."

But Miriam, standing before him like an accusing spirit, met unflinchingly the gaze of his burning eyes and said, "Leave me, vile tempter! The tender, suffering Christ was tempted by such as you. But He yielded not, though He knew that Calvary awaited Him."

Then Despair answered sneeringly, "What have you to do with Christ? In your extremity, has He not forsaken you?"

"No, He will never forsake me if I trust in Him," and, raising her sad eyes to heaven, she cried, "Oh, Christ! Thou who hast known all of suffering, forsake me not in my extremity."

Then Despair fled from her presence hiding himself in the lower room of the tower.

CHAPTER III.

HOPE.

ONE morning as Miriam walked in her desolate garden, she found a flower that had not been choked by the weeds, a little white lily-of-the-valley, and as she stood caressing it a cheerful voice at her side said, "Good morning, Miriam."

She turned and saw a tall, fair woman smiling upon her. Her blue eyes were large and bright and her cheeks like the heart of a rose.

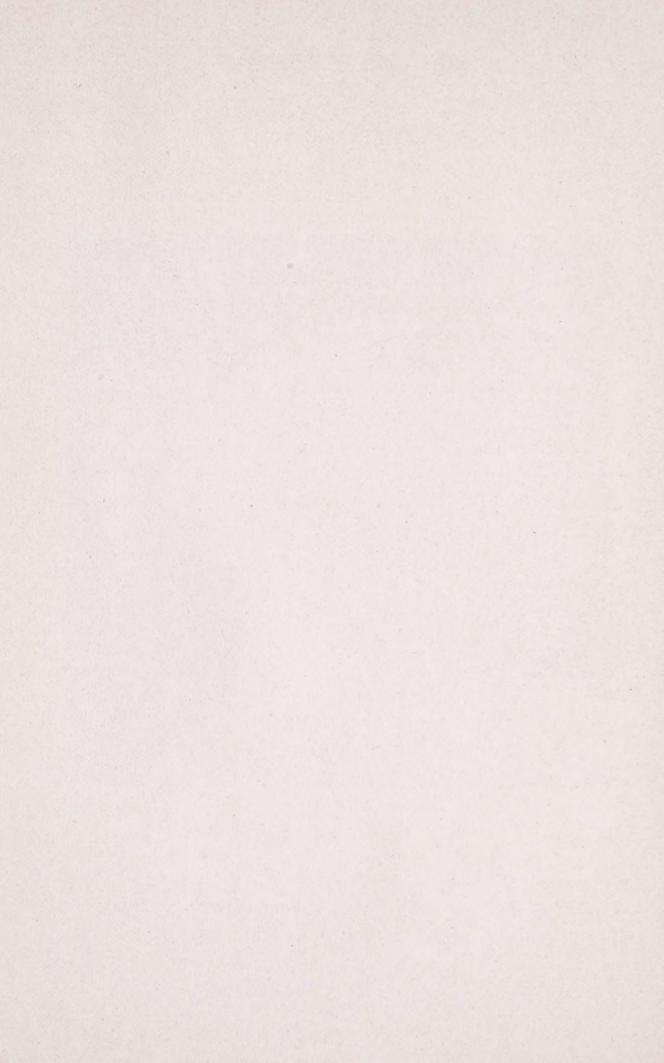
"My name is Hope," said she, I have come to dwell with you. We will drive away Despair and I will be your companion.

Miriam's sad face brightened as she clasped the hands of the fair stranger and said:

- "Welcome, sweet Hope, welcome to Miriam's tower, and promise me, Hope, that you will never forsake me."
- "I will stay with you as long as you need me," answered Hope, "and now let us rid the garden of weeds."
- "It is a hopeless task," answered Miriam, "and the flowers are all dead."
- "No, they are not all dead, some are only choked; we will pull a few weeds to-day and a few to-morrow and so on and on until none are left.



HOPE



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Then we will plant new flowers and pull down the dead vines and plant others."

Hope and Miriam drove Despair from the tower and from the garden and locked the gate; but he ever lingered near, watching them day after day as they pulled the weeds and planted the garden anew. A few of the sweet old flowers remained. The new plants grew, but refused to bloom; and the new vines only put forth pale tendrils.

One morning as Miriam and Hope were walking in the garden, Hope said, "We have cleared the garden of weeds and planted it anew; now let us go to the room that contains the wonderful loom and when we have straightened the tangled threads, you shall weave me a picture of flowers."

They found it a wearisome task; and many of the brightest threads were wasted. But Miriam took the threads that were left, eager to begin her task. Every day she sat at her loom weaving from morning till night; but when the picture was finished it was only a wreath of faded flowers.

Hope turned the picture to the wall and said, "Come, Miriam, here is your harp, touch the strings and the music will cheer your sad spirit."

"How can I play on a harp with broken strings," asked Miriam.

"They are not all broken," answered Hope.

But when Miriam swept her fingers across the strings a strain of mournful music filled the room like the wailings of a broken heart. Then Hope covered the harp and covered the loom and closed the shutters and leading pale Miriam out, she locked the door and they entered the room no more.

After that, in the morning and in the early evening of each day Miriam and her companion could be seen on the balconies looking for Peace and Content. When they were on the north balcony Hope would say, "Look, Miriam! do you not see two white forms coming through the wood?" Wh n on the southern balcony she would say, "Look across the fields. what is it, so white, that the sunlight falls upon?" and from the eastern balcony they would watch the skiffs upon the lake, and Hope would say, "Some day you will see them sailing across the lake from the walled city." But when they visited the western balcony they sat in silence, Miriam gazing with mournful eyes towards the Shining Heights; while Hope's bright eyes were scanning all the paths, she saw not Peace and Content, but often in the distance, she would catch a glimpse of a familiar form, always followed by a black shadow. As the days went by, full of disappointment, sweet Miriam's face grew paler and sadder and Hope's blue eyes lost their brightness and the roses faded from her cheeks. But one bright morning when the lake was calm and blue as the sunny arch above it, suddenly a new light flashed from Hope's blue eyes and a rich color leaped to her cheeks and she said, ' My Miriam, why sit we here waiting for those норе 27

who never come? Let us cross the lake and search the walled city for Peace and Content."

"The walled city!" exclaimed Miriam, "can we, dare we cross the lake and visit the great city, just you and I alone?"

"Have no fear, little one," said Hope, "we cannot get beyond God's care. 'He neither slumbers nor sleeps. The earth is His footstool and His watchful eye sweeps the universe."

Miriam laid her soft cheek against Hope's and said, "thank you, dear, I am not afraid, let us go without delay."

They were like new beings as they floated away across the lake. Singing and laughing merrily while their bright faces were turned toward the city, that grew more and more beautiful as they approached the shore. And as they entered the city they were overwhelmed with its vastness and its magnificence. The next day the search began. With untiring feet they wandered through the broad, sunny streets and shady parks; through dim cathedral aisles and up, up the winding stairways of old, old towers, and they could be seen exploring the palace gardens; haunting the ruined castles; wandering among the tombs in ancient cemeteries standing for hours upon the arched bridges that spanned the winding river; watching the passers-by, and they would often mingle with the crowds visiting the museums, the picture galleries and music halls. While Hope was ever watchful, she was continually striving to divert

Miriam's thoughts from the errand that brought them there, by directing her attention to the scenes of beauty that surrounded them. The castles, the towers, the parks, the fountains, the singing birds and the flowers. But Miriam, remembering the Elysian Fields, would answer sadly:

"These flowers, compared with the flowers I once looked upon, are as blades of grass, and their fragrance, compared with the fragrance of the flowers I loved too well, is like the perfume of flowers long dead. These fountains are beautiful, but the fountains that I once beheld seemed to be tossing diamonds, rubies and pearls into the sunlit air. And when I remember the sculptured forms gleaming within the foliage of the Fields Elysian, these statues are but images of clay. I love the music of these singing birds; but the bright-winged birds of the Elysian Fields sang nothing but hymns of praise. I look upon these lofty towers, these castles and palaces with admiring eyes, but when I recall the dazzling splendor of the white castle upon the Shining Heights, they seem like piles of stone as yet untouched by the builder's hand."

One morning Miriam and Hope lost their way and in trying to retrace their steps they found themselves on one of the poverty-stricken districts of the great city. It was then that Miriam forgot her sadness, forgot the Elysian Fields and the errand that brought them to the city, so full of sorrows and sympathy was her tender heart for these unfortunates. They lingered there for many days,

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cheering the discouraged, comforting the afflicted, soothing the sufferer, and giving bread to the starving ones, and when they left, the prayers and the blessings of the sorrowful ones followed them.

Only a half hour's rapid walk from the abodes of poverty, brought Miriam and Hope to one of the most beautiful parks of the city; and being weary, they entered and seated themselves under a weeping willow near a cooling fountain and watched the rich and fashionable ones of the great city, driving in their elegant carriages along the shady avenues. This careless, brilliant throng in contrast to the poverty and wretchedness they had so lately witnessed, was depressing to the sympathetic girls, and Miriam said:

"These cannot know what the others are suffering, or they would give of their abundance, until this woful contrast between God's creatures would exist no more. There is enough in our Father's great storehouse for all of his children, none need to be hungry or shelterless. Oh, will there never be another 'Golden Age?' I dreamed last night that Virgo and Themis had left their home among the stars, and come back to reign on earth. I saw them sweeping down the milky way in white garments, star-bedecked, waving their farewells to frowning Jupiter, proud Venus, rosy Mars, and all the shining throngs. You and I, sweet Hope, had climbed to the summit of a lofty mountain peak that pierced the clouds, touching the last star in the arch of the Milky Way. But as they approached

so near that we could see their faces, shining as the sun, a black cloud swept between us, hiding them from view and I awoke."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEMPTER AND THE STRANGE BIRD.

THE time of departure had come. Miriam and Hope had searched the walled city in vain. Peace and Content could not be found there. They left the city with heavy hearts; but as they were crossing the lake Hope's face grew cheerful and she said:

"Perhaps Peace and Content have come in our absence and are awaiting us at the tower.

But when they reached the tower they found it empty and Despair lurking among the weeds in the garden. And in the days that followed Hope grew weak and Despair grew strong and drove her from the tower and the garden and poor Miriam was again in his power. And one day he stood before her in the upper room and said mockingly, "Are you not tired of this loneliness, Miriam? Did I not tell you the truth? Peace and Content have not come back to you, and where is your false lover? I saw him but yesterday; his face was like flint and his face is an index of his heart. He was followed by his "shadow" and I followed him and laughed to see him shrinking in terror from this black mystery. There is only one way to escape but he will not accept it, for there dwells

within his breast a demon, blacker than the shadow that follows him, and this demon is ever whispering in his ears these words, 'There is no harm in crushing a human heart. It is not true that a drop of blood from a wounded heart leaves a stain upon the soul for eternity. Broken vows are nothing, you have done no harm, neither have you lost anything. Life is complete without love. Love is but a myth and fear not the black shadow, it will soon fade away."

"Then Miriam exclaimed, "Oh, where are the pitying angels! the guardian angels of our lives, why are they not whispering in his ears the sweet truths that might make his life blessed and his soul stainless for eternity?"

Then said Despair, "the good angels have forsaken him, even as they have forsaken you. The future has nothing in store for you but misery; grief will not kill you, your young veins are too full of warm, red blood. No, you will live to drain the cup to its bitter dregs."

Then drawing near to Miriam, he said:

"As you crossed the lake, did you look down into the water and note how deep and calm it was? and did you think how peacefully one might rest in its quiet depths, free from all sorrow and heartache? To-night when the moon appears above the western heights, flooding the lake with silver, go, sad Miriam, and give yourself and your sorrows to the beautiful lake."

Miriam answered not, but pointed to a picture

on the wall, the picture of Christ crowned with the cruel thorns, and, as she looked into the suffering face, a sweet peace stole into her heart, driving out the anguish, and when she turned, Despair had fled from the accusing face upon the wall. He was seen no more in the upper rooms but guarded with unceasing vigilance the outer door at the foot of the tower. But one fair morning Hope returned strong and rosy. There was a struggle at the gate; Hope entered and Despair was cast out. Up the winding stairs she sped with bounding steps and found Miriam alone in the upper room and they were soon clasped in each other's arms, laughing and weeping for joy.

Miriam said, "Never leave me again, sweet Hope; without you I am desolate."

"We will be separated no more," answered Hope.

That night, as they were seated upon the eastern balcony, their white forms bathed in the soft effulgence of the moon, Miriam's heart was light once more. The bitterness of the past was forgotten, only sweet memories hovered near her like white-winged spirits from some unspoiled Eden. She lightly fingered her guitar, and then began singing:

MIRIAM'S SONG.

If I were a bird at his casement I would sing
From morn till night;
Folded should remain each little golden wing,
Not seeking flight,

Till he should feel within his heart music divine, And from his soul, the melody flowing back to mine.

If I were a little brook I'd sing for him alone; Babbling of love

As I danced the pebbles o'er, leaping from stone to stone.

While from above

I'd woo the gentle breeze to whisper in his ear Of the sweet long ago, once to him so dear.

If I were a lily, pure and white, each bloom His hand could win,

And all the richness of the rare perfume Would be for him.

Or, if I were a buttercup, it would be sweet As he passed by to softly caress his feet.

One morning, as Miriam entered the upper room of the tower, she found perched above the picture of the Madonna a blackbird. It was sitting upon its claws with folded wings and head drawn down into the feathers of the neck. Miriam tried to drive the bird from the room through the open window, where it had entered during the night, but the bird refused to leave its perch upon the picture-frame, and moved not a feather, but only followed with its half-closed eyes, the waving scarf in Miriam's hand.

At this moment Hope entered the room and said, "What have we here? A visitor that arrived in the night while we were sleeping? And what are you doing, Miriam? You are not very polite to your guest. He is rather of an ungracious-looking bird, I

must admit; perhaps he is one of the black spirits of the Night, belated and caught by the Dawn before he could escape to the dark caves in the regions of Night, where these spirits hide themselves like bats from the light of the sun."

"I am sure it is a bird of evil omen," said Miriam.

"Let us drive it from the room."

"Be not hasty, my dear," said Hope, "have you not heard that 'we may entertain angels unawares?' Let me interview this stranger before we drive him away."

At these words she placed a chair beneath the picture where the bird was perched, and stepping upon it, she reached up her hand and stroked the breast of the bird, saying, "Who are you, my bonny bird? why are you here and whence came you? have you journeyed far to visit Miriam and me, or have you come to dwell with us in Miriam's vine-draped tower? Speak to me, my bonny bird I am your friend, and you are welcome here."

Then a transformation took place that delighted the astonished girls. Suddenly the bird arose on its slender legs, opened wide its brilliant eyes, and raised from the black feathers of the neck, a silver crest tipped with scarlet, and when it spread its wings and tail, ruffling its plumage, the girls discovered that one side of each long feather of the wings and tail was golden, and the plumage that covered the body was one-half silver, but when folded the black overlapped the silver and gold. The bird circled round and round the room, flaunt-

ing its brilliant plumage before the eyes of the bewildered girls, then again perching above the picture of the Madonna, it began to sing. The melody was so entrancing that the girls stood spellbound, scarcely breathing until the song was ended.

The strange bird lingered at Miriam's tower, filling the rooms with music and brightness. He was not a prisoner but came and went at his pleasure, through the open casements. He loved the lofty turrets and the treetops, but sang his sweetest songs when perched above the picture of the Madonna in the upper room of the tower.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD ABBEY IN THE WOODS.

ONE morning, when the girls were on the southern balcony, Miriam, looking off at the hills, and said wonderingly, "How I long to know what is beyond the purple hills."

"Let us go to-morrow and see what is there," answered Hope, I have heard that there is a quaint old village, half in ruins, at the foot of the hills, on the other side.

"We will visit the village to-morrow," said Miriam, "Peace and Content may be dwelling there."

In the early morning of the next day the girls left the tower and wended their way across the dewy fields all bright with daisies. The meadow-larks were singing gleefully. Now and then a mother bird would fly up from the grass at their feet with a shrill cry, but when they stopped suddenly for fear of treading upon the nest, they would find by careful search that no nest was near.

"Oh, the cunning little mothers!" said Miriam, "they leave the nest at a safe distance and creep through the grass to deceive us. We will not get a glimpse of a little birdling or a nest of tiny eggs to-day." But finally, not far away, they saw a bird, with a wriggling worm in her beak, settle down in the tall grass, close to a wild rose bush. They stealthily approached the hidden nest, but the mother bird had taken alarm and before they reached the spot, she arose in the grass before them, screaming and fluttering in the air.

"It is no use, little mother," said Miriam, "we are going straight to the nest and have a peep at your babies."

And there they were, sure enough, four little unfledged birdlings with open mouths, crying for food, quite unconscious of danger. The mother bird had followed them and the angry mate was there, and other birds came at the cry of distress, screaming as they darted at the laughing girls.

"Let us go," said Hope, "or they will peck out our eyes."

But when a little way off, they stopped to watch the victorious birds swinging on the rosebush and singing in great glee over the routing of the enemy.

The sun was high in the heavens when they reached the summit of the hill they wished to cross, and looked down upon the little village where the locust and willows were waving o'er its half-deserted streets and ruined towers, and where the unmolested ivy, ever creeping upwards, fastens its clinging tendrils in every niche and crevice, as it drapes its glossy leaves o'er broken columns and crumbling walls, hiding from curious gaze the decay

of age and unsightly scars left by the fierce storms of the centuries.

"The ivy," said Hope, "is like the mantle of charity that Christ taught his children to wrap tenderly around the weak, erring ones, hiding their infirmities from the mocking world."

"Yes," answered Miriam, "even in nature God shows his tender compassion."

When they had descended the hill, they entered the quaint old village, and Miriam said:

"Why did we search the great city by the lake for Peace and Content? It is to just such a calm and peaceful spot as this they would come."

For hours they roamed through the quiet streets, passing under broken arches, with their drapery of vines; crossing the mossy bridges, standing in awe before the ivy-grown ruins of an ancient monastery and resting upon the worn steps of the old stone chapel in the shadow of the huge crucifix that had withstood the storms of many winters. After inquiring of priest and peasant, and searching the village o'er and o'er, they found not Miriam's lost companions, Peace and Content.

As they were leaving the village, they saw a man enter it from the other side. He walked rapidly, looking eagerly about him. And wherever he went he was followed by a black shadow. As Miriam watched him with tearful eyes, she said:

"Perhaps he, too, is searching for Peace and Content."

As Miriam and Hope walked back across the

fields at the close of the day, there was a delicate perfume in the air. A mingling of wild roses, clover and elder blossoms. Soft music was afloat on the breezes; the good-night songs of the little birds, the drowsy hum of insects and the murmur of the winding brook, whose source was in the purple hills. Hope gathered daisies and wild roses along the way, but Miriam plucked here and there a great golden sunflower until her hands were full of them, and as she pressed them to her heart, she said:

"I love the sunflower because it is an emblem of constancy. Poor Clytie! when Apollo proved false to her, she would look upon nothing but the sun; and the great sun loved her and transformed her into a flower, the sunflower. And her face is ever turned toward him, who never fails her. Through all the ages they have been true to each other."

One morning, many weeks after Miriam and Hope had visited the little village beyond the purple hills, Hope said to Miriam, "You are growing sad and depressed, and last night I saw Despair lurking in the shadows of the garden. I am tired of the tower and so are you. I long for the woods and I know that you love to wander there. Far in the depths of the forest is an old, old abbey, where many find rest from the noise and turmoil of the world. Peace and Content may be lingering there within its walls and shady gardens. Let us go to-morrow and search for the old abbey. Every hour the deep-toned bell rings from its

lofty tower, echoing through the forest to guide the weary traveler to this haven of rest."

Miriam sprang to her feet and said, "Why should we wait until to-morrow? Let us go to-day. Come, the morning is fair and I am longing for the scent of the mossy old woods."

As the girls left the tower they saw not Despair hiding in the shrubbery, nor heard the low laugh of derision that followed them as they closed the gate. When they entered the woods, Miriam was transformed, her eyes were shining; her cheeks were flushed and her laughter echoed through the leafy arches and, as she followed Hope along the winding paths, she said gayly:

"I seem to have winged feet like Mercury, the little messenger of the gods. Are the voices of the wood speaking to you, Hope? They are saying such wonderful things to me."

Then Hope looked smilingly into Miriam's face and began chanting:

If we walk through this fair world with unseeing eyes
Unsympathizing hearts and dull ears,
Untrained to catch the music of the spheres,
We miss half the beauty of the earth and skies.

'Tis joy to feel the grass caress our feet;
And to know that each gentle breeze
That laughs and plays among the leaves,
Loves to fan tired brows, and cool the flushed cheek.

The flowers nod and smile as we pass by,
Why should we not return their mute caresses?
The floating lilies and the water cresses
Look up with grateful hearts into the sky.

The cool dim woods are full of whispering voices

And how restful are the placid lakes

Beneath the willows, fringed with sedgy brakes;

The earth's so fair, each little bird rejoices.

When Hope had finished her song, Miriam said, "Yes, the world is very fair. It is only God's children who complain. The little birds are rejoicing this morning. I understand their language and even the leaves are bringing sweet messages to me. I think that in some former existence I was a wood nymph. You know that the wood nymphs perished with the trees that had been their abodes. I have a strange affection for the trees; I cannot look upon one that is being felled; every stroke of the ax hurts me, I have to flee from the sight and stop my ears to the cruel blows. Tell me, Hope, why are you smiling? Oh, I know, you are thinking that perhaps in that other existence I was Diana's favorite nymph, that garrulous 'Echo.'"

"No, my dear," answered Hope, "if Echo had been like you, Narcissus would not have preferred death to her embraces."

Then Miriam said sadly, "You have forgotten, sweet friend, the sad story of Miriam and her Narcisus."

The girls had penetrated deep into the forest before they heard the first faint echo of the distant bell, and the day was far spent when the old abbey burst open their view in all its ancient beauty. The ivy-grown towers and parapets, the lofty turrets and slender spires were all aglow with the rays of the setting sun and when the chime of bells rang forth, filling the echoing forest with anthems of praise, Miriam clasped her hands and raising her enraptured face to heaven, cried in quivering accents, "Oh God, Thou art my Father and though all the world forsake me yet will I trust in Thee!"

They lingered for days at the old abbey and, although Miriam found not there the gentle companions of those happy days before the destroyer came, yet, in her heart, she carried away from this sacred spot, so much of faith and trust and peacefulness, that with Hope ever at her side, she ceased to grieve and search for those sweet companions, lost to her forever.

When Despair saw Miriam and Hope returning with their hands full of flowers and mosses, hiding himself behind a broken column of the ruined chateau, he peered through the drapery of vines, and when he saw Miriam's calm face and caught the new light that beamed from her beautiful eyes and noted Hope's majestic tread and radiant face, he fled forever from the spot where stood sweet Miriam's tower.

ECHOES FROM MIRIAM'S TOWER.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF THE TOWER.

It was the twilight hour; Miriam and Hope had been out on the balcony watching the changing splendor of the sunset clouds. The marginal clouds of gray, flooded with golden light, had gradually overspread the entire heavens. A shower gathered in the east almost obscuring the city beyond the lake; and the rainbow that spanned the eastern sky, slowly faded away as the sun sank behind the Shining Heights. The golden light faded from the clouds and a sudden downpour of rain drove the girls from the balcony. They were silent for a while as they sat in the upper room listening to the patter of the rain and the complaining cry of the orioles in the sycamore tree, close to the western balcony.

Hope was the first to speak.

"Tell me, Miriam," said she, "what are you thinking of so intently?"

"I was thinking of my little tower. Did you know that it had a history of its own? I found an

old manuscript, written by one of my ancestors, that contains the history of the tower. I know by your face that you are anxious to hear it. Shall I read you the manuscript or tell you its contents?"

"Oh, tell me the story of the tower, here in the twilight, to the music of the rain, beating upon its mossy walls."

"When you have heard the story of the tower," said Miriam, "you will understand how fitting it is that your little Miriam should be dwelling here."

THE STORY OF THE TOWER.

"My tower, began Miriam," was built many years after the main chateau, by my great-greatuncle, Claude Lorenze. He was the only son and heir of the chateau and the vast estates that surrounded it. He was a magnificent fellow, brilliant, handsome and noble, so states the narrator, the pride and idol of his family, which consisted of father, mother, two sisters, and little Alene, a distant relative, who, being left a penniless orphan at an early age, was adopted into the family and so much of tenderness and affection was lavished upon her, that she never knew the meaning of orphanage. This little dainty, clinging creature was the pet of the stately mother and queenly daughters of the house of Lorenze and was the betrothed of the son and heir of this noble house. He bestowed upon this little winsome girl all the deep and ardent love of his strong nature; in his true and noble heart she reigned supreme. He

had one friend whom he loved as a brother. Their friendship commenced at the university where both were educated and they were companions in their travels abroad. This friendship was of such a close and intimate nature that at the university they were known by these various cognomens, 'Damon and Pythias,' 'David and Jonathan,' 'Theseus and Pirithous.' The mysterious attraction that opposite natures have for each other must have drawn these two men together. Leister Arden was fair and slender, with a face as delicate and beautiful as a woman's. He was a poet and an artist and was winning and fascinating to a wonderful degree. Claude had told this friend of the story of his deep and all-absorbing love for little Alene, and brought him to the chateau to paint her picture and he was to remain until after the marriage, which was to take place a few months later. As Claude's friend, he was warmly welcomed and treated as a son and brother by the noble family. The portrait progressed but slowly, as the artist was only allowed certain hours of the day for confining himself to work.

"During those long summer days much attention was given to a little tower that was being erected at the sunny southeast corner of the chateau. Nothing but the walls connected it with the chateau. It could only be entered from the outside. It was called Alene's tower, as Claude was having it built to gratify a sweet whim of hers.

"One moonlight night when she and Claude were

walking in the garden (it was a blissful evening to Claude, for she had just named the wedding day), as they reached a seat by the fountain, Alene said: 'Let us sit down and look at the chateau, how fair and stately it appears in the moonlight! I have been so happy here that I do not wish to go away, not even for a bridal tour. Build me a little tower, Claude, at this sunny corner of the chateau and let us spend the first month of our honeymoon there, seeing no one but our attendant. Let us have four rooms, one above the other, with balconies at the deep windows, and four little turrets with open casements, where the birds can build their nests in the summer, and in the winter be sheltered from the storm. The upper room, with hangings of crimson and gold shall be our boudoir. The silver and white room beneath, will be the bridal chamber, and the room on the second floor shall be our library, and the dining-room shall be on the ground floor. No one will see us during that month, only as they may catch glimpses of us in the upper balconies. But they will hear our voices in song and the strains of my harp as the music floats out through the open windows. And every year at the anniversary of our marriage, we will repair to the tower for a month, seeing no one; and thus, year after year, we may live over and over again those blissful days.' Here Miriam paused and said: 'So familiar am I with the manuscript that I can almost repeat its contents word for word. The narrator goes on to say that the

tower was built and furnished just as planned by little Alene, and all was in readiness for the bride and groom before the day appointed for the wedding. Those long summer days of quiet happiness were never forgotten. No shadow of impending evil marred their brightness. As the wedding day drew near, Alene grew pale and nervous, and, one day, while trying on one of the exquisite garments that was being fashioned for her, she began to tremble and burst into tears. Then, laughing nervously, she said: 'Don't you see how tired I am?' At another time, she fainted in her wedding dress, and the mother said: 'Poor little one! She is but a delicate child, the excitement and the trying on of so many garments has exhausted her; we must be more careful in the future.'

"The wedding morning dawned at last; a calm, fair morning, without a cloud to mar the perfect azure of the sky. The breakfast hour had come, the family were assembled in the dining-hall, but neither Alene nor Leister had appeared. One of the servants was sent to call Leister, and the mother said to her daughter Mildred (who, by the way, was my great-great-grandmother), 'Go, my dear, and bring Alene down.' Mildred left the room but soon returned, her face was very white, and she held in her trembling hand, a sealed letter which she gave to her brother. The room was silent as death, and every eye was fixed upon him as he tore open the envelope. The letter was but brief, and when he had finished it, his stern,

ghastly face was terrible to behold. He dropped the open letter on the floor and staggered from the room. And the writer tells us that he shut himself up in the tower, and they saw him no more for days. Mildred picked up the letter, and in a trembling voice, read these lines, addressed to Claude:

"'It is midnight, Leister is waiting for me below. I had thought to go away without leaving any message for you, but I am forced to write a few lines -not to plead with you to forgive me, for I know that would be in vain. None of you, who have been so kind to little Alene, will ever forgive her. I thought that I loved you, Claude, but it was only as a sister loves a brother. But my love for Leister is an overpowering passion that I cannot resist. I should never do wrong, for wrong-doing is horrible to me. No one but God knows what I have suffered in the last few weeks, and am now suffering; but I love him so much that I cannot resist him. I know that retribution will follow us; but do not curse us, Claude, oh, do not curse us! Farewell forever! ALENE.

"The narrator gives a touching account of that day of gloom. Instead of wedding festivities there was mourning at the chateau. The shutters were closed and the rooms darkened, as though death had entered there. The servants were sent forth upon the swiftest horses to tell the wedding guests that the marriage would not take place.

They were to put spurs to their horses as soon as the message was delivered, waiting not to be questioned. The house servants hastened, by order of the master, to remove all traces of the festivities. No member of the household, not even the lowest servant, was allowed to partake of the rich and delicate viands that had been prepared for the wedding feast. But all was gathered into baskets and distributed among the poor. Each basket was covered with flowers-exquisite flowers, torn from the lofty rooms they had filled with beauty and perfume, fated to brighten the habitations of the poor instead of gracing the festive halls. The dainty garments of the wedding trousseau were folded and laid away in the wardrobes of Alene's room, as we fold and lay away the garments of the dead. The room was darkened, the door was locked, and they entered it no more. Just as you and I, sweet Hope, closed the room that contains the broken harp, the loom with the tangled threads and the picture of faded flowers; that fatal room that was once the silver and white bridal chamber.

At the chateau, the names of the fugitives were never mentioned. Only once Claude spoke of them to his mother:

"This is a double sorrow," said he, "that will embitter my whole life. I have not only lost my love, but have been robbed of her by my friend, whom I loved and trusted as a brother."

The writer states that from that day he was a changed man; he was never heard to laugh, and

seldom smiled; a silent man, mingling but little with the world, but ever ready to come forth at the call of the wronged and the oppressed. To the poor he gave abundantly of his wealth, and in the solitude of his lonely tower he wrote books that will be read as long as the world stands, because from their fair pages a human heart, chastened and purified by suffering, speaks to other suffering hearts in words of deep and holy sympathy.

"Have you his books?" interrupted Hope.

"Yes; and how often they have soothed my troubled spirit. Perhaps while writing those sweet passages that comfort my heart, he had a vision of Miriam, the last of her race, deserted by a false love as he was deserted, and like him seeking refuge in the lonely tower.

"Once, while Claude was stopping for a few days in a distant city, he stood before the window of the morgue, and there, stretched upon a marble slab, was the form of his false friend, so changed that he would not have recognized it, but for the name posted above. As no one claimed the wasted body of the suicide, the man whom he had so cruelly wronged gave him a Christian burial. And by inquiry found that Alene had been dead many years and was buried among strangers in a distant land.

"After the discovery of the fate of the two beings once so dear to him, Claude became more silent and gloomy than before, separating himself almost entirely from human companionship. It had been

his habit, as the anniversary of that fatal day drew near, to shut himself up in the tower, do you understand, Hope? The tower, that is my only inheritance, and remain there for weeks, seeing no one but the old and faithful servant who attended him. And on the morning of the twentieth anniversary, when the servant entered his room, the room just beneath us, Hope, that was called the bridal chamber, he found his beloved master seated before a table, where the lamp that he had lighted the night before, was still burning. He was apparently sleeping with his head resting against the velvet cushion, and the servant noticed with awe, the look of perfect peace that rested upon his face. He spoke his name but he answered not; he touched his arm but he moved not; he laid his hand upon his forehead, it was icy cold; the weary heart had found rest at last; and upon the table in the lamp's ruddy glow, lay the miniature of his false love and his false friend."

CHAPTER VII.

HOPE'S DREAM.

IT was a dreary night in autumn, Miriam and Hope were alone in the upper room of the tower. All day, from the low hanging clouds the rain had been falling and as night approached the wind arose, whirling the wet leaves, swaying the trees, and beating the rain against the window-panes. Miriam had closed the shutters and all was bright and pleasant within. The logs blazed high in the wide fire place and the room was filled with the fragance of the flowers blooming in the deep embrasure of the south window. Hope was seated in her favorite chair, her golden head thrown back against the purple cushions, her cheeks were like the pink carnations she wore at her belt, and a smile played about her lips as she turned her starry eyes to sweet Miriam, and said:

"This has been a dreary Thanksgiving day and now, as it is drawing to a close, I will sing you my Thanksgiving hymn; then I will tell you a dream that Morpheus sent me last night, or rather in the gray of the early morning."

"A dream," said Miriam, drawing her chair nearer to Hope and fixing her bright eyes expectantly upon her face, "I was going to ask you for a story, but I will have the dream to-night and the story to-morrow night. Now sing me the hymn, then tell me the dream."

Then Hope, softly picking the guitar that lay across her lap, began singing in reverent tones:

Great Giver of all good, this day
In thankfulness we turn to Thee;
Thy tender mercies, full and free,
Are fadeless flowers along life's way.

In bounteous gifts we see Thy love;
The beauties of this earth are ours;
The lofty peaks, the vales, the flowers,
And all the shining stars above.

Friendship and love are gifts of Thine,
The sweetest gifts that earth can know;
A glimpse of Heaven here below,
A symbol of Thy love divine.

In joy or grief we turn to Thee,
The music of Thy tender voice
Can make the saddest heart rejoice,
Before Thy smile all shadows flee

When the hymn was finished there were tears in Miriam's eyes, and she said softly, "Thank you, dear, it is very beautiful. Now tell me the dream."

HOPE'S DREAM.

"We were together, Miriam and I, in a beautiful mountain village. We wandered through the streets for a while; then leaving the village we

crossed the rustic bridge and a winding path soon brought us to the entrance of a cañon. Oh, had I words to describe the wild romantic beauty of this wonderful cañon. Fascinated by its grandeur and sublimity, we wandered on and on, gazing up at the towering cliffs, pinnacled and turretted like the ruins of ancient castles, and peering down into the gorge where a mountain stream dashed over the glistening rocks. As we emerged from the cañon a sunny plateau was spread out before us and in the centre of the plateau, surrounded by willows, was a lovely lake. The willows, the rushes and the tall velvety cat-tails were distinctly mirrored in its depths and upon its bosom were exquisite waterlilies and white swans were playing in the water. So enchanting was the scene that we forgot that 'time is fleeting' until we saw the sun disappear behind the distant peaks. Then taking a farewell look at the beautiful lake, we hastily entered the cañon and walked rapidly toward the village. the twilight deepened, the cañon in its mysterious grandeur was like some dim cathedral aisle, growing dimmer and darker, until just as we reached the narrowest and most dangerous path, darkness enveloped us like a pall. We stopped for a moment terrified and bewildered. Miriam clasped my arm and said in a whisper:

"' We shall perish here in the darkness, we will

meet death in the gorge below.'

"I had been watching a black cloud far in the eastern sky and it seemed to crown the summit of a lofty mountain peak, transforming it into a volcano with crater of inky blackness, and just above this strange cloud, there now appeared a little shining star.

"I said to Miriam, 'we must fix our eyes upon that little star and walk straight ahead, never veering to the right or to the left and it will guide us safely through the cañon.' Then hand in hand, we walked on with our eyes fixed upon the star. Once Miriam said in a frightened whisper, 'Hark! I hear a low growl; I believe some wild beast is near us.' And I answered, 'Fear not, little sister; 'tis only the wind moaning in the caverns.'

"And again she said, 'There are two men walking behind us, O, I am afraid! We are lost! We are lost!"

"I answered, 'Be not afraid, God is walking beside us in the darkness.'

"The black cloud in the eastern sky had been slowly creeping up toward the star.

"Suddenly Miriam said, 'Look, the black cloud has swallowed up the little star, now we have nothing to guide us.' As she spoke the cloud parted to the right and to the left, like sable curtains drawn back by silver cords and the full moon burst forth in all its splendor, flooding the cañon, the snow-capped peaks, the stream, the mountain daisies at our feet, and the church spires of the village with a dazzling light. As we stood gazing in rapture at the wondrous transformation, the two men came up and passed us. One carried a little

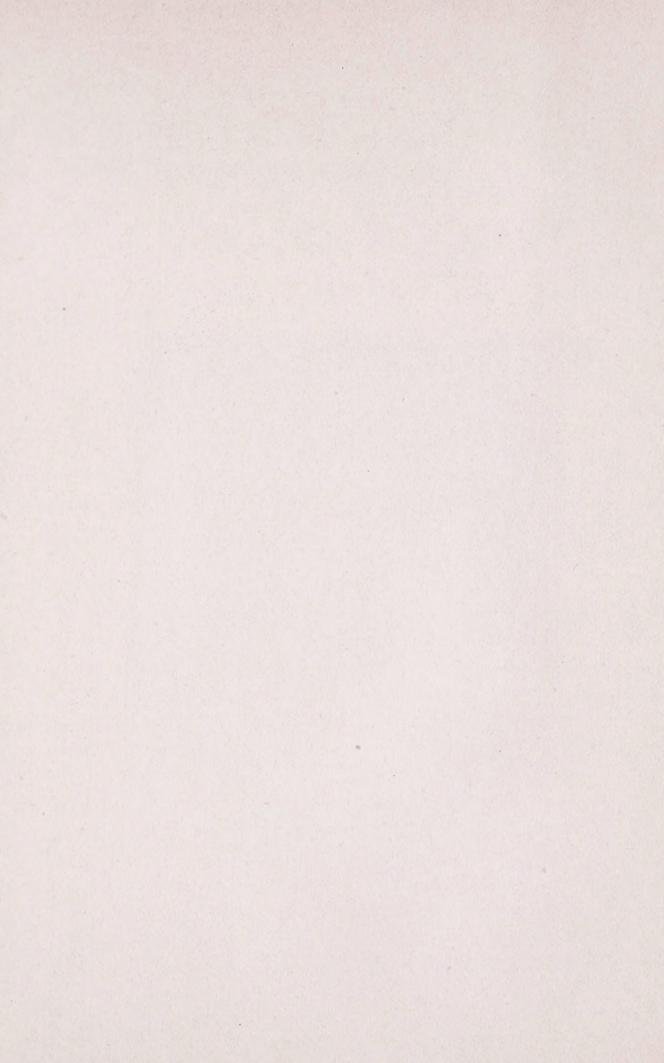
sleeping child in his arms; its head lay upon his shoulder. It had the face of a cherub and the long yellow hair shone like gold in the moonlight. The other man carried a basket of white lilies. We walked behind them toward the village, inhaling the fragrance of the lilies and gazing upon the lovely face of the sleeping child. As we entered the village, Miriam exclaimed:

"'Oh, the beautiful lilies! I love them better than any other flower.'

"Then the man who carried the lilies turned and selecting the most perfect one, gave it to her with a smile. This man had a face never to be forgotten, so noble and kind, and she took the lily from his hand and pressed it to her lips. The child awoke and smiled upon us; then Miriam bending forward with the lily still pressed to her lips, after gazing for a moment into the dark, tender eyes of the smiling child, dropped the lily and held out her arms, exclaiming passionately: 'Give me the child, Oh, give me the child!'

"At the sound of her voice, the man turned, their eyes met; and their faces were illumined. He laid the child in her arms and clasped them both to his heart, then I knew that the little child was Love. It had been sleeping but now it was awake. I picked up the lily Miriam had dropped, the sweet white lily her lips had pressed, and hid it in my bosom. And here my dream ended. When I awoke, it was the early dawn of Thanksgiving morning. My lily was gone; but its exquisite

fragrance seemed to pervade the room, and hanging upon memory's wall was a rare new picture that can never be effaced."





MARGARET'S PEARL

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET'S PEARL.

IT had been snowing since morning; large flakes steadily falling. The day was still and it lay where it fell, covering everything with its whiteness. A rare picture for that sunny clime. Evening had come. Miriam and Hope were standing by the window looking out at the snow-covered ruins of the old chateau and admiring its weird beauty. White and ghostly in the moonlight stood the walls, the broken columns and parapets, the arches and the ruined towers.

"It is the snow lying upon the ivy that makes it so beautiful," said Miriam, "it is all wreathed in snow. It is seldom that the old chateau is arrayed in bridal robes, or are they funeral vestments? I seem to see tombs below and white-sheeted forms gliding among them."

"I almost see them myself," interrupted Hope, with a shiver.

Then they laughingly closed the shutters and drew near to the fire, where a log was blazing brightly in the deep grate.

"You must tell me a story, Hope, to dispel these ghosts," said Miriam. "Let it be of a goldenhaired girl, on the white sea beach, watching and waiting for her lover to sail in from across the sea."
Hope smiled and said, "You had better tell the story yourself, my dear."

Then for awhile she sat looking thoughtfully into the fire, until Miriam, rocking in her low chair, began tapping the floor impatiently with her tiny slippered foot.

Then Hope looked up and asked, "Have I ever told you the story of Margaret's Pearl?"

"Margaret's Pearl," repeated Miriam, "no you have never told me the story. Was it a pearl of great price, and did Margaret sell all her possessions to buy this wonderful pearl? Or did her lover bring it to her from some far country? Did she wear it pendant to a slender chain about her white neck, or was it set in a band of gold that encircled her dainty finger? Or, perhaps it was too precious to wear and she kept it in a silver casket, lined with violet plush and locked with a golden key. But tell me the story, Hope. I know that I shall love sweet Margaret, yet envy her the pearl."

MARGARET'S PEARL.

"A young girl was walking to and fro upon the white sea beach, every motion of her slender form was full of grace; her hair, loosened by the breeze, glittered like gold in the sunlight; her fair face was very sad as she watched the ebb and flow of the tide. It was a perfect day, the sea was calm, reflecting the blue of the cloudless sky; white skiffs were dancing upon the waves and in the distance

was a ship faintly outlined against the western horizon and in the east was a chain of lofty mountains, whose peaks were crowned with everlasting snows. And nestling there between the mountains and the sea, was the fisherman's village. The neat white cottages with their little gardens and vine-draped porches made a simple and pleasant picture, in its contrast to the grandeur of the mountains and the vastness of the sea.

"The young girl upon the beach was now standing motionless, looking off across the ocean, and as she sang in mournful strains, a group of barefooted children in front of a fisherman's cottage stopped their play and listened to the song. And a little girl raising her finger, said, 'Hark! it is Margaret's Pearl singing to the sea.' Then they crossed themselves, murmuring a prayer to the Virgin and walking toward the beach they stood a little way off with grave faces, listening to the song.

"And one of them said, 'I heard mother say, this morning, that it was a year to-day since the prince was found, half dead upon the beach; Margaret's Pearl remembers; that is why her face is so white and her song so sad.'

"The quiet fisherman's village seemed quite removed from the world, but it was of the world, for in this little village all the holy and sacred passions of the human heart had their sway. A little removed from the village, standing upon a sunny slope, is the quaint stone church with its ivy, its cross and its shining spire, pointing toward

the sky. And near it, in the midst of a garden, brilliant with flowers, stands a rambling old house; its gables, dormer windows, balconies and verandas, half covered with ivy and half hidden by the stately elms that surround it. This is the home of the priest, his sister Margaret and Margaret's Pearl, as she is called by the villagers.

"It was now thirty years since the priest came to the squalid fisherman's village, built his house and brought his little sister Margaret to live with him. They were orphans, he the eldest of a large family, she the youngest, all were dead but these two. The priest was many years older than his sister. He was father, mother, sister and brother to little Margaret and she was the idol of his heart. There had been a dark page in his life's history that she knew not of. He came here to forget, if possible, the sad tragedy of his life. Here he found a people that needed him, and there was plenty of work to do; the squalor of the village was soon changed to comfort and prosperity; he loved his people and they loved and reverenced him. Father Osmond was indeed a father to them, sympathizing with them in their joys and in their sorrows, looking after their temporal as well as their spiritual needs; a good shepherd watching his flock with untiring vigilance, unwilling that even one should go astray. Under the teachings and companionship of her brother, the little Margaret grew into fair and perfect womanhood. 'Rare, pale . Margaret,' stately and sweet as the lilies that

grew in the old garden; the pride of the village, beloved by all and satisfied with her quiet joys until Lucean came—fair, blue-eyed Lucean with his winning voice and sunny smile. Lucean, noble, tender and true. They met and loved as naturely as the flowers love the sunlight. In the little church decorated with flowers and sea-shells, there was a wedding one bright May morning. All the villagers were there in their holiday dress, and when Margaret and Lucean entered the church, a young girl standing by the door said softly, 'Oh, I know that they have seen the angels.'

"And the priest, looking into their faces, as he pronounced them man and wife, thought of the 'young-eyed cherubims.'

"After the ceremony, the dainty feast at the old house, and the tearful farewells, Lucean took his bride away to the home he had prepared for her, in a beautiful suburb of a distant city.

"They missed Margaret in the village; her kind words and pleasant smiles had made sunshine in their hearts and on the Sabbath day they missed her sweet voice singing in the little church; they missed her at mass and at vespers and the old house was lonely without her. But the heart of her brother was cheered by her loving letters, so full of unclouded happiness. But alas! alas! poor Margaret, in three short, sweet years, all was ended. Lucean was stricken with fever and died and Margaret, broken-hearted, returned to the old home, bringing with her baby Lucille. The child was

her only comfort, she held her continually in her arms, talking to her pathetically.

"'Oh, my baby, my baby!' she would say, 'you are all I have left, they buried your papa out of my sight, but I have his own sweet baby, who looks at me with his tender blue eyes; and you have his golden hair, my darling, and his winning smile.'

"Then she would strain the babe to her breast

and cover it with kisses.

"But before the year was ended, the child drooped and died, and Margaret, white and stricken, stood dry-eyed over the little dead form, and said, 'God has forsaken me.'

"After three days, when they buried the child, Margaret had shed no tears, neither had she slept nor tasted any food, and all the villagers mourned for the babe and for poor Margaret and said, 'Unless she weeps, she will die.'

"At evening of the day that little Lucille was buried the children carried the pink conch shells and placed them around the new-made grave. Then upon the little mound they fashioned a cross of small white shells and in the morning when Margaret came to the grave and saw the border of shells and the white cross, she said, 'The little children are sorry for poor Margaret," and she wept. And day after day she sat by the little mound weeping and would not be comforted.

"One day her brother, who had exhausted every power of his being trying to soothe her grief, found her at the grave weeping and said, taking her thin hands in his, 'Grieve not your life away, my sister, time heals all sorrow. You are young and beautiful; you will marry again and other little ones will come to cheer your heart.'

"' Marry again!' said she, 'Oh brother, you do not understand! I am already wedded; I plighted my vows to Lucean for all time and for eternity. When he died my heart was rent in twain, one-half was buried in his grave and the other half, filled with mother-love, was left bleeding in my breast. My soul dwells not here, but in heaven with Lucean and my child. Love is immortal; it is divine, it cannot die, it knows no change.'

"And her brother answered fervently, 'Blessed is he who possesses this priceless jewel, but woe unto him who tramples it under his feet.'

"One night there was a terrible storm at sea; no one slept in the little village for fear of a tidal wave. In the gray of the early morning, when the tired villagers were sleeping, Father Osmond, walking down to the beach, found a little child, lashed to a spar that had been swept ashore by the storm. He thought the child was dead; but as he loosened the cords and took the little form in his arms, she opened her eyes, looked up into his face and smiled. He carried the child to the house and gave her to his sister, saying:

"'Here, Margaret, God has sent you a baby in place of little Lucille, take her, she is yours, name her Lucille and grieve no more for the lost one, she is safe with the angels.'

"Margaret clasped the child to her heart and said, 'No, I will not call her Lucille, there can be but one Lucille; I will call her Pearl. She is a Pearl cast up by the sea. Her hair is like the yellow seaweed that floats in with the tide; her ears are like the delicate sea-shells that the children gather on the beach; her eyes are like the cloudless skies and as bright as the stars that are reflected in the ocean. And oh, her velvet cheeks and little clinging hands! God has not forsaken me but has sent this sweet waif of the sea to fill my empty heart and empty arms.'

"The child's little wet garments were of costly fabric, exquisitely fine, and delicately fashioned, and Margaret always kept her in dainty white garments. Little Pearl grew rapidly, she was slender and graceful as a fairy and as sweet and gentle as she was fair to look upon. The affection and devotion that existed between Margaret and the child was beautiful to behold. And this child of the sea was the light of Father Osmond's eyes and the joy of his heart.

"She filled the old house with sunshine, music and laughter; and yet she was thoughtful and studious and always helpful and unselfish. She was beloved by the rough fishermen and their wives and the children were never so happy as when Pearl was playing with them on the beach; or seating herself on the sand with the children around her, she would tell them wonderful fairy tales, that no one had ever heard before. It was a fair picture that Mar-

garet loved to look upon. Little Pearl, in white with her flower-like face and golden curls, surrounded by the brown-faced children, all looking wide-eyed into her dimpled face, as she told them her marvelous tales.

"The years brought but few changes to the little village by the sea. Life was calm and uneventful, but to Margaret and Pearl its quiet joys were very sweet, becaused shared together; and their loving companionship and thoughtful tenderness made the priest almost forget 'that dark chapter' in his life's history. And to the villagers Margaret and Pearl were but little lower than the angels, so kind and gracious were they to all; there were none that had not felt the clasp of their hands and the sunshine of their smiles falling upon them. In sickness and in sorrow they were always near, to comfort and to help. They twined the funeral wreaths and the bridal garlands and lovers came to them, and poured into their willing ears their tales of disappointment or of joy.

"Through all these years the grave of little Lucille was never forgotten. Every day in winter as in summer Margaret and Pearl laid fresh flowers upon the little mound in the churchyard. Margaret grew more beautiful with the years; not a line marred the calm beauty of her face; and there were no threads of silver in the dark braids that crowned her queenly head. Her dark eyes were luminous with the mysterious light that is only given to those who have seen beyond the veil.

"Pearl had blossomed into sweetest womanhood, endowed with every witching charm and girlish grace; blythe and merry as the birds singing in the old elm trees, but lacking not sweet dignity and seriousness.

"One morning Margaret said to her brother, 'It is eighteen years ago to-day that the storm brought our precious Pearl to us and we are going to have a storm to-night. The sky is copper color and the angry waves are lashing the beach, just as they did the day before that night of terror, eighteen years ago.'

"As her brother was about to reply, Pearl burst into the room with glowing cheeks and loosened hair and said breathlessly:

"'Uncle, we are going to have an awful storm, so the fishermen say, they have just come in with their boats. The sea-gulls are flying near the shore and the stormy petrels are screaming at the wind. I have so longed to see a dreadful storm, like the one that tossed me on the beach eighteen years ago. Oh, I love the storm and the waves for bringing me to you and mamma.' Then she kissed them both and continued: 'I do hope we will have another storm like that, God will take care of the ships.'

"Pearl had her wish gratified; a wilder storm never beat upon that shore. All night they watched it in its awful grandeur, Pearl clinging to her uncle and Margaret, terrified at the fury of the shrieking winds and thundering waves. But the morning dawned at last. The storm had spent itself, but the waves still rolled high and black clouds were scudding across the gray heavens. As Father Osmond, accompanied by Margaret and Pearl, was walking toward the beach in the early morning, a fisherman came running to meet them, and said, excitedly:

"'There is a man lying upon the beach, I think he is dead."

"The priest said to Margaret and Pearl, 'You had better go back to the house, my dears.'

"But Pearl said, 'Mamma, let us go with uncle, the man may not be dead.'

"So together they hastened to the beach, and there, lying with his white face upturned to the sky, was the form of a young man, apparently lifeless. The face, noble and handsome, was made more ghastly in contrast with the jet-black hair, brows, and long black lashes that touched the white cheeks. Upon the strong white hand that lay across his breast, glowed a splendid ruby, the only touch of color upon the inanimate form. Father Osmond knelt beside the prostrate form, placing his hand over the heart, then springing to his feet, exclaimed, 'There is life!'

"Then, motioning to the group of fishermen standing near, he said, 'Lift the man carefully and bring him to the house.'

"And there, in the guest-chamber of the old house, Margaret and her brother did everything in their power to restore the man to consciousness, and it was hours before their unceasing efforts were rewarded. But at last the stranger opened his eyes, looked about him and asked in a feeble voice, 'Where am I, and what has happened to me?'

"The priest answered, 'My son, you were shipwrecked in the storm of last night, and now you are safe in the home of Father Osmond. But you must not talk, there will be time enough for that by and by."

"The stranger smiled and closed his eyes wearily.

"In a few days he was sitting up, and recovered rapidly, because of his splendid constitution. He had told them his name, Rudolph Lorne, and something of his history; but he dwelt especially upon his ocean voyage and the details of the storm and shipwreck.

"His manner was courtly and winning, his conversation brilliant and pleasing. It was a delightful break in the quiet life at the parsonage. Father Osmond, Margaret and Pearl never tired of hearing him talk of the world of which they knew so little, and in return they made his forced sojourn with them as pleasant as possible. He was soon able to walk out into the garden, and one beautiful Sabbath morning he went for the first time to the little stone church, and in the years that followed, how often he recalled the sweet experience and calm beauty of that morning. The sea, reflecting the soft azure of the sky, was placid as a lake, and a white skiff, floating upon its bosom, seemed a phantom sail appearing and disappearing in the silvery mist that hovered o'er the waters.

purple mountains seemed far away, so faintly were they outlined against the sky. Fleecy clouds floated below their summits, leaving the snowy peaks glowing pink above the clouds. The church bell's soft ringing was in harmony with the stillness and holy calm of the morning. Father Osmond and Pearl walked together along the narrow path that led to the church, followed by Margaret and the stranger. Margaret's eyes were fixed upon the distant heights, but he saw nothing but the exquisite grace of the slender form before him. She was all in white, even to the dainty shoes, and beneath her broad hat with its wreath of marguerites, glittered a coil of golden hair, the little stray curls caressing her white neck.

"As they reached the door of the church she turned and gave them one smiling glance; her cheeks were softly red and her violet eyes were like stars.

"To Rudolph Lorne that morning service was like a strange but pleasant dream. How solemnly the music of the organ rolled out upon the still air. To him the white forms of Margaret and Pearl, standing before the chancel, were the figures of the Madonna and an angel, and the melody of their voices fell upon his ears like the music of the heavenly choirs. Vaguely he saw the noble form of Father Osmond in his priestly robes, and heard him speaking in eloquent, yet simple language, words of holy counsel to his people. A bright-winged oriole flitted past the open window again and again,

trilling his tender notes, and in solemn undertone surged the ceaseless music of the sea.

"The long summer days slipped away, and the stranger still lingered in the little village by the sea. And Margaret knew why he lingered, for his heart was in his eyes, and his eyes were ever following winsome Pearl. When he was near, her eyes were always veiled by their long lashes, that he might not read in their liquid depths, the sweet secret hidden in her heart; but the tell-tale roses on her cheeks revealed the secret that her eyes so closely veiled.

"One perfect evening, when the garden was flooded with moonlight, Margaret sat alone by the open window, dreamily watching Rudolph and Pearl, walking to and fro along the flower-bordered path, disappearing for a moment in the shrubbery where the path curved, then reappearing in the moonlight. Margaret's heart was full of the 'Sweet long ago,' she was living over again those brief years of happiness. It seemed such a little while since she and Lucean walked together in the moon-lit spaces of the garden along the same path that Rudolph and Pearl were now treading. Lucean was telling her the 'sweet old story' that is ever new. The present was forgotten, nothing was real but the past. Her cheeks were flushed, a tender smile played round her lips; she heard Lucean's loving voice once more, and felt his kisses on her cheek; and again in her arms she held the warm, dimpled form of baby Lucille. As

she mused, Rudolph and Pearl had left the garden and entered the room, but she saw them not until they knelt before her and clasped her hands. Their faces were transfigured in the moonlight, and Rudolph said in a voice tremulous with emotion:

"'We love each other and Pearl has promised to be my wife, give us your blessing, sweet Margaret."

"Then Margaret laid her hands upon their bowed heads, and raising her eyes to Heaven, said solemnly:

"'May God's richest blessings crown your lives, my dear ones; may grief and separation be unknown to you.' Then addressing Rudolph, she said:

"'As you deal with my precious child, Rudolph Lorne, so may God deal with you.'

"And he answered fervently: 'I will be as true to her as the stars are to the firmanent; yes—even as true to her as God is to His children."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOST RUBY.

"RUDOLPH was to leave the village in a few days and return in the spring to claim his bride. These last days were very precious to the lovers. Pearl wore upon her finger the beautiful ruby ring that had been in the Lorne family for many generations. It was a jewel of great value and was said to bring happiness and prosperity to those who wore it.

"The lovers had spent their last evening together in the perfumed garden with only the stars and the flowers to witness their tender farewells, but in the morning, down on the beach they would meet to

say good-by.

"As they were standing in the shadow of the old elms, loth to separate, Rudolph said, 'Before we part, my little Pearl, I will tell you a secret: I am the son of a king, the crown prince. Some day I shall be king of a great realm and you will be my queen.'

"Then giving her the farewell kiss, he said goodnight and was gone.

"Pearl stood motionless for awhile, trembling and bewildered, then she stole into the house by the side door and up to her chamber, avoiding Margaret. When she reached the room she locked the door and seated herself by the open window, her face, that a few moments before was flushed and joyous, looked wan in the moonlight. For hours she sat thinking of the secret that her lover had revealed to her at parting, and suddenly she threw up her arms and began moaning and talking to herself.

- "'It cannot be, it cannot be,' she cried, 'my beautiful dream is ended. It will break my heart but I must give him back the ring. No, it cannot be, it is not fitting that he, the son of a king, should marry a nameless waif, and place her upon his throne, I love him too well to let him make the sacrifice. He will soon forget little Pearl; but oh, my heart! my heart!'
- "The next morning when Margaret came, as was her wont, to give Pearl a good-morning kiss, she was shocked at the white, suffering face upon the pillow.
- "'My poor little girl,' said she, 'are you grieving because Rudolph is going away? Cheer up, sweetheart, it will only be for a little while.'
- "Then she threw her arms around Margaret's neck and said:
- "' Mamma, I had rather not see Rudolph until we meet to say good-by down on the beach, will you tell him?"
- "'Yes, little one, and I will bring you some coffee and a nice breakfast and I will help you dress and kiss the roses back into your cheeks, before you meet Rudolph to say good-by. Cheer up, my

dear, you will hardly miss him until he will be back again.'

"Pearl was standing upon the beach, her face was as white as the dress she wore and when the prince joined her, he exclaimed: 'My little Pearl, why are you so pale this morning.'

"And she answered, 'Last night my heart was troubled and perplexed because of the secret you told me, but this morning all is clear to me, there is but one way, and that is the right way.' Then drawing the ring from her finger, she said:

"'Rudolph, we must part. You will soon forget little Pearl. I would not have worn the ring had I known that you were the son of a king. It is not fitting that you, a noble prince, who will be a king of a great realm, should wed a nameless waif. Here I give you back your ring. Go and marry some noble princess, befitting your rank and forget little Pearl.'

He did not take the ring, but said excitedly, 'I care not who you are, I love you and I shall marry you. Put the ring back on your finger and we will talk of it no more.'

"'I cannot, Rudolph, it is better that we should part. I dare not marry you now that I know you are a prince. Here is your ring.' He took it from her hand and tossed it upon the sands. His face was white with anger, and, pointing to the ring he said haughtily, 'Pick up the ring and put it back on your finger. How dare you remove the ring that I placed there with a vow? I, the de-

scendent of a hundred kings. It is a ring that queens have been proud to wear, but I have chosen to place is upon the finger of a nameless waif.'

"Pearl's face was as white as his, and her eyes were blazing as she answered as haughtily as he

had spoken.

"'I did not throw the ring upon the beach and I will not pick it up, no, not if you were the descendant of a thousand kings. She had never been angry before and with this new sensation, there was revealed to her some hidden power of her being. She felt that she was born to be a queen, that she was as proud and noble as he and she was not afraid of any throne. And thus they stood, looking not at each other, but at the ruby glowing in the sand. And the tide ebbed and flowed, coming a little nearer and a little nearer to the jewel but neither of them spoke or moved, each waiting proudly for the other to save the precious gem. But suddenly the prince raised his eyes and said:

"'I must leave you now, proud Pearl. Farewell my little queen. When you send me the ruby, I will return to you,' then he walked rapidly away.

"Pearl's anger vanished, as she heard the caressing tones of his voice. She tried to call him back, but her tongue refused its office and her feet seemed rooted to the sand, and as she stood there, unable to move, his beloved form disappeared from her sight. Then she remembered the ruby, and turning, saw the waters leaping upon it. She sprang to save the precious gem, but too late.

The unrelenting tide carried it out to sea. Gazing wildly at the receding waters, she cried: 'My ring is gone, and Rupolph will never return.' And faint with anguish she fell insensible upon the beach, and there, a little later, Margaret found her, white and cold. She gathered the little limp form in her arms, calling her by every endearing name to speak to poor Margaret. Finally, with a sigh, she opened her eyes and looked vaguely into Margaret's face for a moment, and then said:

"'Oh, mamma, my heart is broken!' And, leaning her head upon that loving breast she began sobbing like a child that is hurt, and between her sobs she told the story of the parting and the lost ruby and Margaret could say nothing that would bring comfort to her heart.

"And in the days that followed there was no music or laughter in the house by the church. The stricken one was ever sweet and affectionate, kind and thoughtful, neglecting none of the simple duties that were hers to perform. But the brightness had gone out of her face and the starry light was quenched in the violet eyes. She was always upon the beach when the tide ebbed and flowed, hoping and half believing that the tide would bring back the ring it had stolen from her. The weeks and months passed slowly away, until the anniversary of the day that the prince was found, nearly lifeless, upon the beach. It was a sad day for poor Pearl, and as she walked upon the beach, watching the incoming tide, the wild melody of her song

rang out across the waters, mournful and appealing:

"'Give back my gem, oh, sea!
Thou hast so many jewels for thine own,
Thou wouldst not miss one little ruddy stone.
Bring back my ring to me.

"Bring back my gem, bright wave,
Thou knowest all the secrets of the sea.
Oh! search the ocean caves and bring to me
My ruby from its grave.

"Oh, never-failing tide,
Sweep low! sweep low! snatch from the deep
My ruby ring and cast it at my feet,
That I may be his bride.

"Bring back my gem, oh, storm!
When thou hast swept with care, the ocean's floor,
And tossed my rosy jewel to the shore,
Then love, anew, is born."

"As she finished her song she sank wearily upon the sand, still watching the tide and lost in the memories of the past. The setting sun sank lower and lower until it dropped like a ball of fire into the sea. The twilight deepened into night. The stars came out, one by one, then the moon rose from behind the mountains, flooding the snowcapped peaks with a white splendor and shedding a silvery light upon the sea.

"Pearl had been watching a boat approaching the beach; a tail man with a long white beard was plying the oars; as he neared the shore, he beckoned to Pearl and she arose and walked toward the boat, and the man said:

"'I have heard your song, sweet pearl of the sea, and if you would regain the lost ruby, come with me.'

"She gave him her hand and stepped into the boat and they drifted away toward the south, keeping near the shore. Neither of them spoke; all was silent save the rhythmical dip of the oars and the swish of the waves against the boat. sea was full of violet shadows beneath the white crested waves; and once Pearl broke the silence by exclaiming, 'Oh, how beautiful!' as her eyes rested upon a ship in full sail, standing white and motionless in the fan-shaped reflection of the moon. When the ship, becalmed, faded from her sight, she turned her eyes toward the shore and as they glided over the calm waters, she saw in the distance great cities, 'thick with towers,' and the music of the cathedral chimes was borne faintly to her ears upon the fragrant breezes-fragrant with the scent of the magnolia and orange blossoms. Upon rocky bluffs were stately castles, with their slender turrets glittering like silver in the moonlight, and groves of waving palms, delighted her unaccustomed eyes. When they had drifted for hours she saw that the shore was fading away and that the strange boatman was swiftly plying his oars, urging his boat out into mid-ocean. In another hour, the

boat stopped suddenly, rocked gently upon the waves for a moment, then began sinking.

"Pearl, terror-stricken, grasped the arm of the boatman and cried, 'The boat is sinking! the boat is sinking!'

"He answered soothingly, 'Be not afraid, little Pearl, I am the king of the sea, the waters obey me, they shall not harm you.'

"The boat sank slowly with a slight rocking motion, down, down through fathoms and fathoms of water. When a little below the surface it grew dark, but as they neared the bottom of the ocean the waters became luminous, they were surrounded by the weird creatures of the deep, their fins glowing with phosphorescent light. The boat soon touched the bottom and was fastened to a coral reef and Pearl stood upon the shelly ocean bed looking about her, speechless with wonder and delight. All was luminous with phosphorescent light from the coral bushes and from the strange creatures of the deep that carry their lights with them. These moving lights flashing in and out of the dark ocean caves, gave momentary glimpses of the fantastic interiors, some of alabaster, others of pink and red coral, mingled with crystalline formations that sparkled like diamonds in the moving lights. There were fields of tall waving flowers, brilliant in coloring and groves of swaying trees with fern-like foliage and half hidden beneath their floating branches were shoals of little fishes with opalescent scales.

"From the moss-covered rocks grew great orchidshaped flowers of exquisite coloring. And from the huge yellow sponges trailed glossy vines, the long, floating tendrils starred with white blossoms. And near them were immense fan-shaped coral sprays, pink and white and as delicate as lacework. Everywhere were wonderful shells—lodged in the sponges, resting upon the mossy rocks, lying upon the white sand with the gleaming starfishes, and piled high against the coral cliffs. And the ground was literally strewn with these treasures of the deep.

"A new surprise awaited Pearl, more wonderful than all the rest. The king gave a musical whistle and from the alabaster caves the mermaids came floating out. Their beautiful forms, nude to the waist, gleamed like ivory and the scales upon their fish-like extremities were iridescent, glittering like gems in the changing lights of the sea. Upon their swan-like necks, their long white arms, and slender fingers sparkled the rarest jewels that the mines of earth have ever yielded. These strange creatures clustered around one even more beautiful than the rest.

"'It is Sylva, the queen of the mermaids,' said the king, in answer to Pearl's look of inquiry.

"They all fixed their eyes upon this earth-born maiden, large, soft, dark eyes, like those of a fawn, with no expression but that of innocent wonderment. At a signal from the king they began singing, swaying their forms and waving their jeweled

arms and no mortal ever before listened to such wild, beautiful melody as fell upon the ears of Pearl as she stood breathless and enchanted in the midst of this wondrous scene. All the hideous creatures of the deep lay motionless upon the waves, charmed by the melody. When the mermaids had finished their song, Sylva, the queen, began combing her long, golden tresses and as she drew the tortoise-shell comb through her hair, Pearl caught the flash of a ruby among the jewels upon her hand and breaking away from the king and rushing toward the group of frightened mermaids, who gave way as she came, she stood before the queen, reached out her hands and said beseechingly:

"'Oh, Sylva! beautiful Sylva, give me the ruby on your finger. It is mine, Sylva. The tide carried it away; oh, give it to me, sweet Sylva! for my lover will never come back until I send him the ring.' Sylva slowly removed the ring from her finger and without a word or a smile, but with just that look of wonderment in her soft dark eyes, she gave the ring to Pearl, and she, clasping the cold, white hand in hers, covered it with kisses, then, followed by the wondering eyes of the mermaids, she returned to the king, flashed the jewel before his eyes and said:

"'I have found my lost ruby and now I am

ready to return.'

"Then they entered the boat and slowly it rose, without resistance from the waters, to the surface

of the sea, followed by the mermaids singing, as they floated hour after hour upon the moonlit waves. And, as they approached the little fishing village, and Pearl had again and again thanked the king of the sea for his great kindness to her, Sylva, the queen, clasped the unresisting form of Pearl in her arms and carried her to the beach. Then they floated away, the boat, the strange boatman and the mermaids, singing as they went, and Pearl stood watching them as they floated away into the darkness and the music was lost in the moaning of the sea. Then she heard Margaret calling her.

"' Pearl, Pearl, my darling, where are you?"

"She started up and looked about her, dazed and bewildered and said sorrowfully, 'It was only a dream, I have been sleeping in the sand.'

"But as she spoke she saw in the wet sand at her feet a sparkle of red, it was the lost ruby. She snatched it from the sand and ran to meet Margaret, exclaiming:

- "' Mamma, I have found my lost ruby,' and she held it up to the astonished gaze of Margaret, who asked:
 - "" Where did you find it, my child?"
- "'In the bottom of the sea, on the finger of Sylva, the queen of the mermaids,' she answered, with a merry laugh, whose music, hushed so long, sounded very sweet in Margaret's ears.

"When they reached the house, they hurried up the broad stairway to the library, where Father Osmond was sitting surrounded by his books. And Pearl waved her hand before his eyes, exclaiming:

- "'Oh, uncle, I have found my lost ruby! I have found my lost ruby! and now I will tell you and mamma a strange story.'
- "As she seated herself in a large chair leaning her fair head against the crimson cushions, they noticed, with sadness, how slight and frail she had grown in a few short months. She was silent for a moment, as holding up her little white hand, she gazed with shining eyes upon the ruby. Then she told them her beautiful dream and when she had finished, Margaret said solemnly:
- "'Our prayers were not in vain, my sweet child, God loves his children; all things are possible with him; he speaks to the winds and the waves and they obey him; he spoke to the tide and it brought back your ring.'
- "'Yes, God is good,' said the priest, 'he hears our prayers and answers them in his own good time and in his own good way. I think I can explain the mystery of the sudden appearance of the lost ruby. The incoming tide did not carry the ring away but pushed it deep into the sand and there it has lain, buried until to-day, when the tide, repentant of the mischief it had caused, washed the sand away and left the ring uncovered.'
- "Then, said Pearl, I know not which of you is right, but this I do know, that the Good Father heard my cry, for here upon my finger is the precious ring."

"There was great rejoicing in the village when it was known that Margaret's Pearl had found her lost ruby and mysterious tales were told of some strange creature of the deep, bringing back the ring one moonlight night, when Margaret's Pearl was singing on the beach. And the children listened wideeyed and were continually wishing that they had been out on the beach that night, hidden behind the fishing boats. They talked of nothing else for days and days and wondered what this strange creature was like, and wondered if Margaret's Pearl was not afraid when it came up out of the sea to give her the ring. And the fishermen's wives said that Margaret's Pearl had sent the ring to the prince and that some day he would come in a wonderful painted boat, with bands playing and silken banners waving in the breeze. Then they would have another wedding in the little church, even more beautiful than Margaret's.

"'Time flies like the wind,' said a white-haired woman, "it is twenty-two years this month since Margaret was married. Poor Margaret! in a little while she was widowed and childless. May the prince live until his hair is as white as mine.'

"As the weeks slipped away, the villagers watched Pearl every day, as she walked upon the beach, not a listless form with a pale sad face, and mournful voice, singing to the sea; but every motion of the graceful form alert and eager, cheeks like the pink sea shells and shining eyes ever looking, expectantly, toward the south. Margaret and her brother

watched her anxiously, their loving hearts filled with conflicting emotions of hope, doubt and fear, but among the villagers there was not one doubting heart. Each morning they scanned the southern horizon and said, 'The prince may come to-day,' and at night they said, 'he will surely come to-morrow.' And in Pearl's heart a little bird was ever singing the same song o'er and o'er:

"' My love is coming back to me,
Back to me,
His ship's afloat upon the sea,
Upon the sea,
He loves but me, he loves but me."

"And they were not false notes that the little bird sang within her heart, for one day when the sky was bluer than ever before; and the sea was calm, save the little ripples that danced and laughed upon its bosom, far in the south there appeared a white sail, and as it drew nearer and nearer, proudly riding upon the waves, Pearl saw a beautiful yacht, all white and shining in the sunlight and upon the deck, stood the prince and she caught the sparkle of the ruby as he waved his hand to her and when he leaped upon the beach and clasped her in his arms, the women and children standing a little way off, laughed and cried for joy; and there was joy in the old house beneath the elms. And in the little church all draped with vines and wreathed with flowers, the prince and Pearl, standing before the altar with enraptured faces, plighted their sacred vows, and when all was over—the beautiful ceremony and the lingering farewells—the prince and
princess sailed away, in the white yacht toward the
land of palms. And when the forms upon the deck
could be seen no more the wavings ceased, and the
group upon the beach stood, silent and tearful,
watching the white yacht until it was no larger than
a bird and slowly faded away into the shimmering
mists that hung low upon the sea."

CHAPTER X.

A WHITE CHRISTMAS.

IT was the day before Christmas; a fire was burning in the grate but the windows were open and the upper room of the tower was flooded with sunshine, Miriam coming in from the balcony said to Hope, "To-morrow is Christmas, I am afraid it will not be a white Christmas. We have had but one fall of snow as you remember, it came one day and was gone the next. And what a beautiful dreamy Indian summer we have had since then. But I wish it would snow to-morrow for I love a white Christmas. Get your hat, Hope, and let us go and gather some holly and creeping pines and we will search the woods for mistletoe, and to-night we will decorate my little tower for Christmas." When they reached the woods it was so pleasant there that they wandered through the winding paths for an hour and then began to gather the holly and creeping pines.

"The woods are always grand and beautiful," said Miriam, "even in winter. Look up, Hope, and see the wonderful network of bare branches with their millions of little twigs outlined against the blue, and how pleasing to the eye is the contrast between the russet and the rich green of the pines and hemlocks."

The sun shining through the bare trees cast fantastic shadows along the path that the girls had taken. The rustling of the crisp leaves beneath their feet startled the little creatures of the forest. The squirrels would dart across their path, then stop to sit up and watch them with their bright inquisitive eyes, but disappearing like a flash as they drew near. And the curiosity of the rabbits, bounding along the path before them, would overcome their timidity and they too, would stop, sitting up with ears erect and quivering nostrils, to watch the fair intruders. The woods were alive with little brown snow birds and the red birds were whistling merrily in the tree tops, their bright breasts as they flew from tree to tree, giving a touch of color to the sombre browns and grays.

"The red bird is my favorite of all the birds," said Hope, "he never forsakes us; but in summer and winter, in sunshine and storm, he sings the same glad song o'er and o'er, 'What cheer! what cheer!"

"Oh, the darlings," interrupted Miriam, "how plain they say, 'What cheer! what cheer!' The orioles have a rival in my heart. They went with the summer, leaving us nothing but their hanging nests, while the red bird stays to cheer the winter solitude."

"We have our baskets nearly full of holly and creeping pines," said Hope, "but where is the mistletoe bough?"

"Let us search the oak trees for the mistletoe,"

said Miriam. "You know that it was only the mistletoe that grew on the oak trees that was held sacred by the Druids. Two Druids, all in white, would go hunting the mistletoe. (We should have been dressed in white to-day.) One would mount the tree, cutting the mistletoe with a golden sickle, while the other, standing on the ground, would receive it in his outspread robes."

The girls had spent the afternoon in the woods, but had searched in vain for a mistletoe bough; but as they were returning by another path, suddenly Miriam stopped and exclaimed:

"There it is, Hope, the mistletoe! the mistletoe! Right ahead of us on that old oak tree!"

They hastened forward and stopped beneath the oak and looking up at the coveted mistletoe, white with berries.

"But now that we have found it, how shall we get it?" asked Miriam.

"Nothing easier," said Hope. "The limbs are low, you shall mount my shoulders, you little Druid, and pull yourself up by a limb and cut the mistletoe, while I, the tall Druid, will stand on the ground and catch the sacred bough in my outspread robes, and after that the little Druid will jump, and the tall Druid will catch her."

Hope's plan for securing the mistletoe was successful. They reached the tower just as the sun was setting, triumphantly carrying the mistletoe bough. And that evening, when the lamps were lighted, they festooned the upper room of the

tower with the creeping pines, and they made wreaths of holly and hung them reverently around the pictures of the Christ and the Madonna, and fastened the mistletoe bough to the hanging lamp in the centre of the room, and Miriam, standing beneath it, her sweet face dimpling with laughter, said:

"Now come and kiss me, Hope. You can play that you are my lover."

And as Hope put her arms around the sweet form, kissing her on each soft cheek, she leaned her head upon Hope's breast and said with a sob:

"I once had a lover, Hope. He was false to me, but I cannot forget him. I cannot forget him! I will try to be happy to-morrow, Hope, because you are with me, but the little lute within my heart will only play in the minor key."

"Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" echoed through the halls of the tower as Miriam and Hope met the next morning.

"You have your white Christmas, Miriam," said Hope, "and it is still snowing. Yesterday was summer, to-day it is winter; this climate is like some human beings—beautiful, but fickle."

"Come, Hope, and look at the old chateau," said Miriam. "Last night, while we were sleeping, the Snow Queen came and draped it with white garlands for Christmas. And look at the forest trees, yesterday they were bare and brown, this morning every branch and twig has a tracery of white; and what could be more beautiful than the

pines and hemlocks laden with the white snowblossoms? And the Snow Queen has spread her carpet of moss, deep and white, over the brown old earth. Yes, I have my white Christmas."

"Come," said Hope, picking up her guitar, "let us sing a Christmas anthem before we breakfast."

So, standing before the picture of the Madonna and Child that rested upon an easel festooned with holly and creeping vines, the girls sang in joyful but reverent tones, the anthem they loved best: "Peace on earth, good will to men." And while the last notes still echoed through the tower, the strange bird that had been circling around the room while they were singing, settled upon his favorite perch above the picture of the Madonna on the wall, and burst into joyous song.

"He is singing a Christmas carol," said Miriam.

And the song was so entrancing that the girls listened breathlessly, fearing to lose one note, and when the song was finished, Hope held up her hand, and said:

"Come to me, my bonny bird," and as he perched himself upon her finger, she looked into his brilliant eyes and said: "You are favored above mortals, my sweet bird. Miriam and I were taught by masters of music, but they were only mortal like ourselves. But you were taught by the Great Master, He who taught the morning stars to sing together without one discordant note, and taught the heavenly choirs their anthem of praise; and to 'those who washed their robes and made

them white in the Blood of the Lamb' your Master gave the glorious song of the Redeemed."

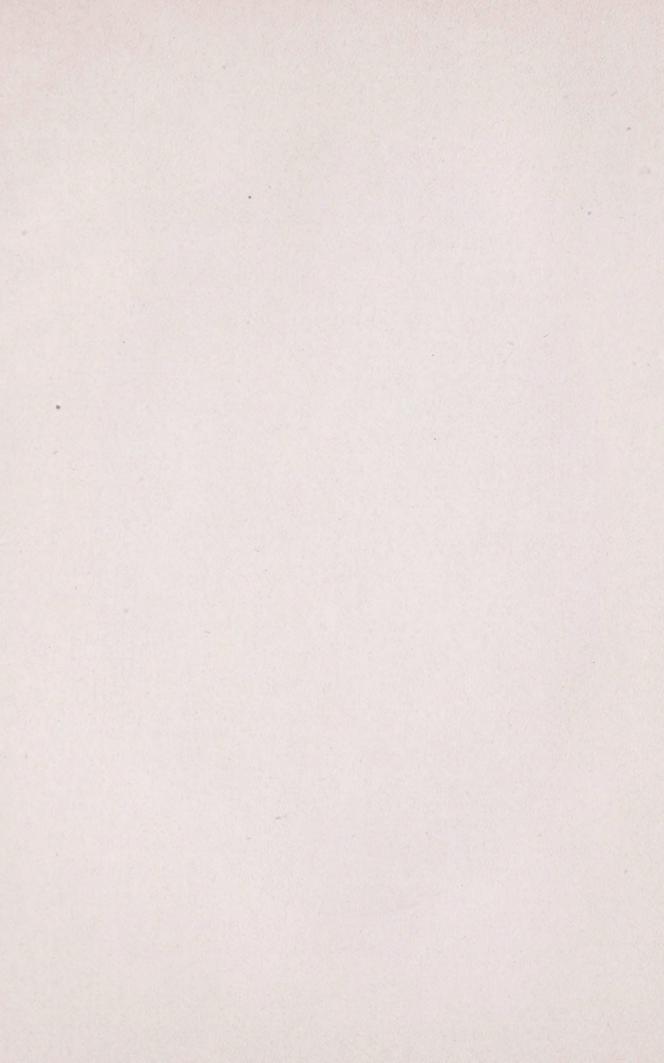
An hour later it had stopped snowing and the clouds were breaking away, and before noon the sky was blue and cloudless, and the white earth flooded with sunshine. The weather had grown colder and the air was full of little particles of frost that glittered like diamonds in the sunlight.

After the clouds cleared away, the girls went out for a walk, but the sharp, frosty air soon drove them back to their cosy sitting-room with its fire of blazing logs, and they spent the day singing Christmas anthems and reading Christmas legends and stories, beginning with the story of the Christ Child in the Book of books, the old, old story that is ever new.

When evening came, Miriam said: "Hope, I have a surprise for you. I am going to tell you a story to-night. Perhaps you will object to my trespassing on your domain."

"No, no," said Hope, "I have always known that you could tell charming stories if you would. Will it be a Christmas story?"

"Yes, a Christmas story, and I shall call it Winifred's Star."





WINIFRED

CHAPTER XI.

WINIFRED'S STAR.

"Robbie, can't you keep awake a little while? Sister has something to tell you."

"Yes, I tan teep awake, I'se not very teepy."

"You know, Robbie, that I was eight years old last week, and you will be four on Christmas day."

"Yes, I knows it."

"And Christmas day is day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, I knows dat too."

"Last Christmas mamma was here. Do you remember how she always called you her little Christmas present?"

"Yes, I remembers."

"And do you remember how we hung our stockings up last Christmas Eve, and how mamma came in the morning and kissed us, but we wished her Merry Christmas first? Then she said, 'You had better get up, my darlings, and look in your stockings, for Santa Claus was here last night.' And don't you remember, Robbie, how warm and pretty the sitting-room was with the fire burning in the grate, and the flowers in the windows, and how the stockings looked all bulged out with the nice things that Santa Claus had brought us; and when we had emptied the stockings on the rug in front of

the grate, mamma came and knelt down by us and hugged us and called us her own sweet babies. Do you remember it, Robbie?"

- "Yes, I remembers," with a sob.
- "Now, don't cry, Robbie dear," choking back her own sobs. "Mamma is up in heaven, but she can look down and see us to-night."
 - "Does she know how told we are?"
- "Are you so very cold, Robbie, dear? Snuggle up to sister and she'll put her arms around you. Now, aint you a little warmer?"
 - "Yes; I dess I is."
 - "Robbie, you must say 'I am,' not 'I is.'"
 - "Sister, does mamma know dat we are hungry?"
- "Are you very hungry, Robbie? You are not going to be hungry any more after Christmas, or cold either. We are going away from here to-morrow morning; that is what I wanted to tell you."
 - "I is so glad ---"
 - "I am," interrupted Winifred.
- "I am so glad," corrected Robbie. Where are we doing, sister?"
- "We are going toward the little star in the east, and it will tell us when to stop."
- "What ittle tar? I didn't know ittle tars could talk."
- "Well, they really can't talk; but don't you remember, Robbie, how mamma used to tell us about the Star in the East that led the wise men to the manger where the child Jesus lay?"

- "Yes, I remembers."
- "Well, I am sure if the little star would lead the wise men to the manger where Jesus lay, it will lead two little orphans who love Jesus to a home where somebody will love them."
 - "But where is the ittle tar?"
- "That's just what I was going to tell you. You know how cold this old garret is toward morning, Robbie."
 - "Yes, I knows."
- "I wake up every morning before daylight and am so cold I can't sleep any more, so I lay here and look out of that little window up there, and I always see the star shining in the east. You know that way is east, Robbie, because the sun rises over there."
 - "Yes," rather doubtfully.
- "Every morning the little star seems to beckon me to come and last night I dreamed that mamma came to me and said, 'Take Robbie, darling, and go toward the little star in the east and it will tell you where to stop.' We can't stay here any longer, Robbie, begging in the streets. Bridget shall never beat you again, I am afraid that I hate her, she is so cruel to us, but I am trying not to, for it is very wicked to hate people. Now, Robbie, we will say our prayers and go to sleep, for we must get up very early in the morning, as soon as the little star is up."
- "Aint you faid, sister, to do out so early in the dark?"

"Oh, no, Jesus loves little children and He will take care of us. Don't you know, Robbie, what He said about little children when He was here on earth? Mamma taught me the verse, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' Now you say it after me, Robbie, and that will be our prayer, then we will go to sleep. Suffer little children—

"Suffer ittle tildren ---"

"to come unto Me-"

"to tome unto Me,"

" and forbid them not-"

"and forbid dem not,"

"for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

"for of tuch is the timdom of heaven."

"Robbie, I wonder if you are ever going to talk plain, no wonder mamma called you her little 'T' boy. You begin nearly every word with a 'T.' Lots of boys at your age talk perfectly plain."

"I tan't help it," said Robbie, with a little quiver

in his voice.

"Of course you can't, you precious boy, sister wasn't scolding you, you are lots smarter than half of the boys that talk plain and just as sweet as you can be. I am glad you are my little 'T' brother."

"I guess we had better say, 'Now I lay me.' after all, for perhaps that little verse wasn't a prayer."

Winifred was awake the next morning, long before the little star appeared in the east; as soon as she saw the star she arose from the hard pallet on the floor and dressed herself as quickly as she could in the dark and with her little fingers numb with cold. As soon as she was dressed she awoke her brother and dressed him. When he cried with the cold, she said:

- "Don't cry, Robbie dear, to-morrow is Christmas, then you won't be cold any more. The little star is going to lead us to a nice warm home. Aint you hungry, Robbie?"
 - "Yes, I is."
 - "Now, Robbie."
 - "Yes, I am."
 - "Sister has some cakes in her little bag.
 - "Where did you det em?"
- "I saved a penny now and then from the money I got begging in the streets. Bridget can't make us beg any more, Robbie. Last night, with the pennies, I bought some crackers and cakes. I've only two cakes, they cost more than crackers; but you love cakes, don't you, Robbie?"
 - "Yes, I does."
 - "Robbie, you must say, I do, and not I does."
 - "All wight, sister. Can I have a take now?"
- "Yes, Robbie, you can have three crackers and a cake. Then you can have the other cake for your dinner with three more crackers."
 - "No, no, sister, you eat one of the takes."
- "No; sister is going to eat crackers, she don't care much about cakes, anyway; she bought them for Robbie."

When they had finished their rations of crackers and cake, Winifred said:

"Now, Robbie, we must say our prayers, then we will go. I know, Robbie, just what I want to ask Jesus to do for us. So I will pray out loud and you can listen, and when I am through, you must say, Amen, and that will mean that you and I are asking Jesus for the same thing."

Then upon the bare floor in the cold and the darkness, the little orphans knelt side by side—not alone, for the angels were there—and Winifred, with childish faith, offered her petition:

"Oh, Jesus, take care of Robbie and me, and let the little star lead us to a nice warm home where somebody will love us. Amen!"

"Amen!" echoed Robbie's lisping voice.

When the children arose from their knees, Winifred took Robbie's hand, and they left the garret and picked their way carefully in the darkness down the four flights of rickety stairs, and gained the street without being discovered. The streets were still quite dark, and Robbie said:

- "Aint you faid, sister?"
- "No, Robbie, Jesus will take care of us. Now we will go straight east."
 - "But where is the ittle tar?"

"It is just over there behind those tall buildings, we will see it when we get out a little farther."

The children walked rapidly, and when daylight appeared, they were far out in the suburbs of the city. When the sun rose it was quite warm, and there was but little snow on the ground. By eight

o'clock, Robbie's little legs had grown very tired, and he began to cry with fatigue and hunger.

"Now, don't cry, Robbie," said Winifred, "we will stop at the very next house we come to and take a good rest, and perhaps they will give us some breakfast."

The next house was an old-fashioned, wood-colored house, standing back from the road in a grove of maples. An elderly man was standing by the gate. Winifred stopped and said:

"Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning," said a pleasant voice, "where did you little folks come from, so early in the morning?"

"We have walked a long ways," answered Winifred, "and my little brother is very tired, can't we come in and rest a while and get warm?"

"Of course you can, come right in, come right in. Have you had any breakfast?"

"Well, no, we didn't stop for breakfast, because we were in a hurry to start, we wanted to get home to-night. But we ate some crackers and cake."

They had followed the man to the house, and he led them into a large kitchen. It was very bright and clean, and seemed delightfully warm to the shivering children. The table was spread, and a kind-faced woman was preparing the meal.

"Put on a couple of extra plates, wife," said the man, "we have company for breakfast."

She came forward and drew the children to the fire and kissed them.

"What sweet darlings you are," said she, "and where did you come from?"

"We came from the city, we started long before daylight."

"And where are you going, my dears?"

"We are going home," answered Winifred.

How delicious the coffee smelled, and to the hungry children nothing ever looked so inviting as that platter of ham and eggs.

Before they went to the table, Winifred whis pered to Robbie:

"Now don't eat as though you had never had anything before."

"All wight, sister."

But when Robbie was seated at the table, and the ham and eggs and a plate of smoking-hot buckwheat cakes were set before him, all swimming in maple syrup, he forgot his sister's caution and ate like a hungry little bear. But not so with Winifred. She maintained the dignity of the family by leisurely sipping her coffee, and eating her breakfast with the same leisurely propriety. When they were through eating, Robbie said:

"That is the best beakfus I ever eated, and I do love toffee wid tream in it."

"Yes, it was a nice breakfast, Robbie. And oh, how good you are to Robbie and me," said Winifred, with tears in her eyes. When a little later Winifred said to Robbie: "Now we must be going," the man of the house asked:

'Which way are you going?"

"Straight east," answered Winifred.

"Then I can give you a ride," said he, "I am going to drive ten miles east this morning and it is time that I was hitching up."

Then the good wife put up a lunch for Robbie and Winifred and wrapped them in warm shawls and kissed them good-by. The good man helped them into the wagon and they were off, and such a lovely ride as they had, all wrapped up in their warm shawls. The sun was shining brightly and the little snow-birds were twittering merrily in the hedge-rows. Robbie had a nice sleep with his head in his sister's lap and Winifred's little heart was continually overflowing with thankfulness.

It was past noon when their kind friend reached the end of his journey and helped the children from the wagon.

"I hate to leave you little folks here," said he. "Are you sure that you can find your way home?"

"Oh, yes, we can't help it if we go straight ahead," said Winifred.

"Well, good-by, and may the kind Father take care of you."

Then he whipped up his horses, turned the corner and was soon out of sight.

"Sister, where are we doing now?" asked Robbie.

"Straight ahead," answered Winifred, taking Robbie by the hand and walking briskly toward the east. "Aren't we having a nice time, Robbie?

You see Jesus heard our prayers and is taking care of us all the time."

"How far are we doing?" asked Robbie.

"We are going until the little star tells us to stop."

"But where is the ittle tar?" looking up at the sky.

"It is right above us, only we can't see it, because the sun is shining."

"I am hungry," announced Robbie.

"What, after that big breakfast?"

"Yes, I is hungry,"

"Robbie, I am going to punish you for saying I is, instead of I am. You have to walk to that pine tree on top of the hill before you can have anything to eat."

"Dat aint very far," said Robbie cheerfully.

When they reached the top of the hill they sat down under the pine tree and opened the basket that contained their lunch and there they found ham sandwiches, cake, pickled peaches and a bottle of milk.

"We must only eat half of the lunch," said Winifred, "and drink half of the milk, because we will need supper by and by. There is plenty enough for two meals. Weren't they good to us, Robbie?"

When they had finished their lunch they trudged along over the hill and down into the valley. By four o'clock the children were very tired and Robsaid between his sobs:

"Sister, I tant do any farder. I is so tired."

"Poor Robbie, sister knows he is tired," wiping his eyes and kissing him. "There is a wagon coming behind us, Robbie, and I am going to ask the man to give us a ride, and I know he will, because everybody is so good to us to-day."

They stopped and watched the wagon coming toward them and as it drew near, Winifred raised her hand and the man stopped his horses and said with a good-natured drawl, "Well, what do you little tramps want?"

"We are not tramps," said Winifred, with great dignity. "We have been walking a long distance and my little brother is tired out. Won't you let us ride until we get rested?"

"Well, I should say I would. Climb in, give me your hand bub, here you are. Now, sis, I'll give you a lift. You can have that back seat all to yourselves."

When they were seated, he said, "Where did you kids come from and where are you going to?"

"We are not kids," answered Winifred, "a kid is a young goat."

"Well, you are a brick, anyway."

"I think you are the funniest man I ever saw," said Winifred, "You know very well that I am not a brick, they use bricks for building chimneys. I am a little girl and my name is Winifred and my brother's name is Robert. We came from the city and are going home.

"Where is your home, little miss?"

"East of here," she replied, "Are you going to drive very far east?"

"Five miles as straight east as the road will

carry me."

"And can we ride five miles with you?"

"I should say you could, I like to be in good company. You are the smartest kid I ever saw, Excuse me, I didn't mean to say kid.

Winifred laughed and said, "oh, you are so

funny!"

It was growing quite dusk when the children were again left standing alone in the roadway.

"I am hungry," said Robbie triumphantly.

"Bless his little heart, if he didn't say 'am hungry' instead of 'is.' You shall have your supper, Robbie, as soon as we find a nice place to sit down."

When they had finished their lunch and walked a mile it was growing quite dark. And Robbie said, "How much farder must we go, sister?"

And she answered, "we must keep going until the little star comes out so it can tell us when we have got home." A half an hour later she said, "Robbie, there is my star."

"How can you tell sister, the little tars are all alike."

"I know my own little star, Robbie."

When they had walked another mile, suddenly Robbie stopped, burst into tears and said, "I tant do any farder. I is so tired."

"I know you are tired, poor little brother, but look, right ahead of us is a village. Don't you see the church steeples shining in the moonlight and the white cottages and the rows of trees all along the streets? It looks like Bethlehem of Judea with the hills all around it."

"May be 'tis Bethelhem of Juda."

"Oh, no, Robbie, Bethlehem of Judea is very far away. Now, Robbie, we must hurry along, for I believe the little star will tell us to stop there."

As they entered the village, Robbie stopped and began to cry again, and said, "I tant do any farder, sister; I is so tired and seepy."

Winifred stopped and looked up at the sky and said joyfully, "Look up, Robbie, the little star is standing still right over that stable. Come, there is where we must stop."

She opened the gate and led Robbie across the yard to the stable, opened the door and they went in and she closed the door behind them.

The moon was shining through a small window, making the barn quite light; there were two stalls, in one was a span of horses, in the other, a cow.

"We will go in here where the cow is," said Winifred.

"Ise faid of the tow," said Robbie, holding back.

"Afraid of the cow, Robbie? The cows did not hurt the child Jesus, when he lay in the manger, and this cow will not hurt us. See, she is lying down, chewing her cud as gentle as a lamb." "She aint a hook tow," said Robbie, viewing her critically, "cause she aint got any horns, so she tould not hurt us if she wanted to,"

Then Winifred, inspecting the manger, said:

- "It is half full of fine hay. How sweet it smells. This will be our bed. I will help you in, Robbie, then I will get in and cover us both with hay. Now, isn't this a nice bed, Robbie? and so warm and cozy. Aint you glad you are not in the hard bed in the old, cold garret?"
 - "Yes, I is."
- "There you are again, Robbie; if you keep saying I is, instead of I am, what will the people think of you in our new home?"
 - "I thought we was doing to live with the tow."
- "Oh, Robbie, you are so cute. Now, we must say our prayers and go to sleep."

Robbie commenced:

- "Now I lay me down to seep, I pray de Lord my tole—to—teep——"
- "Poor, tired little Robbie. He is fast asleep," said Winifred, kissing his lips, then she finished the prayer, "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."

Poor, tired little Winifred, she, too, was fast asleep.

It was Christmas morning. A man and woman were standing before the grate fire in a pleasant sitting-room. Their faces were very sad. The woman laid her head upon her husband's shoulder and began sobbing.

"There, there, Mary, don't cry," said the man soothingly. "Tears will not bring them back. I knew that Christmas would be a hard day for us."

"Oh, Walter, we were so happy last Christmas," said Mary, still sobbing; "our darlings were with us then, but to-day they are sleeping under the snow."

At that moment, in the door that opened from the dining-room, a servant appeared, and the master said:

"What is it, Hiram?"

And he answered with a very mysterious air:

"If you and the mistress would see a purty sight, come out to the stable."

"Come, Mary, and let us see what Hiram has to show us."

So Mary threw a shawl over her head, and they followed Hiram to the stable, and he led them to the cow's manger and said:

" Isn't that a purty sight?"

There in the manger, lying side by side, were two little children, their heads, brown and golden, lay close together on the pillow of hay. Their faces were as beautiful as Raphael's cherubs. As Walter and Mary stood looking at them, the girl opened her eyes, large, violet eyes, full of wonder. She looked at them a moment and then at the cow eating hay from the manger, and as she looked at the sleeping boy, she kissed him, then sitting up, she said:

"Good-morning! and merry Christmas! Oh, it is so beautiful. I was just dreaming of the child

Jesus in the manger, and when I opened my eyes, there stood Mary and Joseph and one of the shepherds, and the cow eating hay, and Robbie lying here asleep in the manger, just like the child Jesus."

"Did you sleep here all night, my dear?" asked

Mary.

"Yes, and it was a nice bed. I like the smell of hay."

"But why didn't you come to the house instead of the barn?"

"Because my little star stood still right over the stable."

"But how did you get into the barn?" asked Walter.

"Why, we just walked in through the door," answered Winifred.

"I forgot to lock the door last night," said Hiram. "I never forgot it before."

"It was my little star that made you forget it," said Winifred.

"Wake the boy," said Walter, "and we will go to the house and have some breakfast, and after breakfast you can tell us all about yourself and little brother."

"Wake up, Robbie! Wake up! It is Christmas morning. Wake up, you sweet boy!"

As soon as Robbie opened his sleepy eyes, he said:

"Why, sister, there's a tow." Then Walter lifted Robbie from the manger, and as he carried him to the house, he said:

"Don't you want some breakfast, Robbie?"

"Yes, I does. I likes buckwheat takes with tirrup, and toffee wid tream in it."

And Winifred said to Mary, "Robbie uses an awful lot of t's when he talks, but he is just as smart as boys that talk plain, and you have no idea how sweet he is."

When breakfast was over they gathered around the grate in the pleasant room, and listened to Winifred's pathetic story. When she was through Mary was sobbing, and Winifred went and leaned against her chair and said, "I am sorry you feel bad. What makes you cry?"

Mary put her arm around her and said, "You and Robbie remind me of my own little girl and boy; they were here last Christmas, but to-day they are sleeping in the churchyard."

Winifred laid her cheek against Mary's and said, "Oh, no, they are not sleeping in the churchyard, but are up in heaven with my mamma and papa, and Robbie and I are here with you. I know now why mamma told me in my dream to take Robbie and go toward the little star, and it would tell us where to stop; your little girl and boy up in heaven told mamma how lonely you were. Aren't you glad that my little star brought us here?"

Then Mary clasped the sweet child to her heart and said, "Blessed be the little star." And Walter, taking Robbie in his arms, repeated fervently, "Blessed be the little star."

CHAPTER XII.

A GARDEN OF DELIGHTS.

It is evening again at Miriam's tower. Hope seated by the grate with her guitar in hand, is playing a dreamy fantasia. A fierce gust of wind sweeps around the tower and Miriam, standing among her flowers by the south window, says:

"Old Boreas is not sighing to-night nor breathing gently but is showing his true character as he did when he seized the nymph Orithyia and carried her away on his noisy wings. I believe his sons, the winged warriors, are with him to-night and they must be chasing those monstrous birds, the harpies, through the darkness, round and round the upper turrets; I hear the wild swish of their huge wings beating the terrified air."

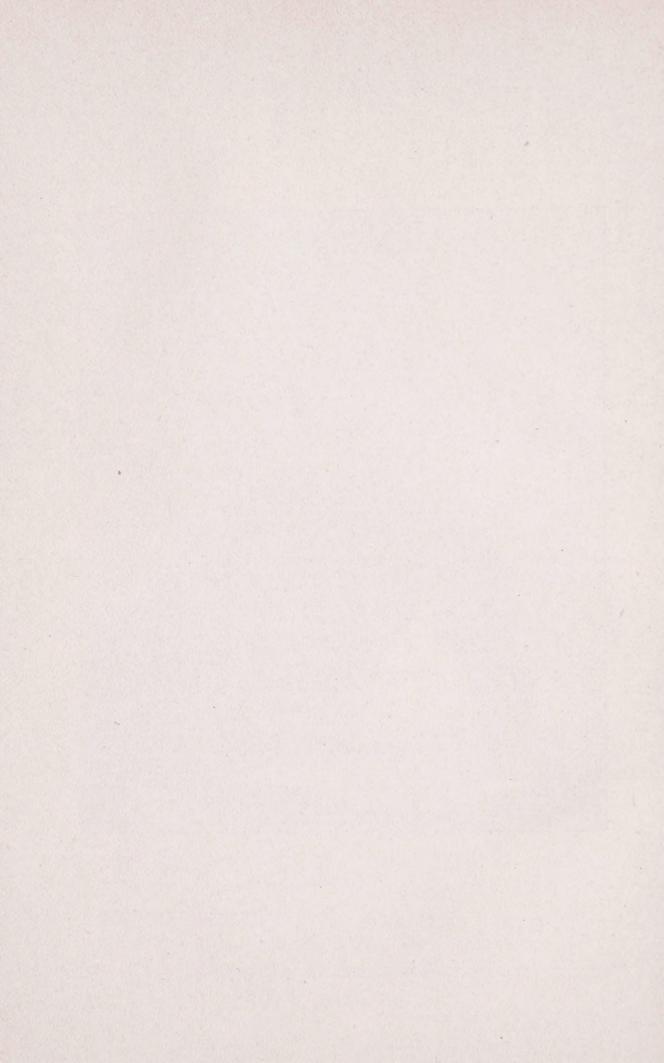
"Miriam, come here," interrupted Hope, "and sit bown by the grate. You are in a strange mood to-night. Never mind the pranks of Old Boreas and his brood, what care we for them."

Miriam obeyed, sinking into her easy chair before the grate and said, "Now that I have obeyed your summons, how are you going to reward my prompt obedience? By singing me a song, telling me a story, or relating some wonderful dream?"

After a moment of thoughtfulness, Hope said,



ROBBIE



"I will tell you a dream that visited my slumbers long ago. It was of a garden and a tower but not your garden and your tower, Miriam. It has been said that, 'Coming events cast their shadows before.' This dream perhaps was a shadow of the tower and the garden where I would dwell with sweet Miriam in the years to come. Now, listen to my dream."

HOPE'S DREAM.

"I was dwelling in a garden of delights. No dust or noise from the outside world reached its quiet shade. The row of stately poplars that surrounded its vine-draped walls were like sentinels guarding it from evil. None but the most beautiful trees grew within my garden. Cedars from Lebanon, Palms from the land of pyramids, lindens, magnolias and catalpas from the sunny south, with the fragrant birch, the beech and graceful elm from the north. None but the rarest flowers bloomed along the winding paths and in the sunlit places; great roses, creamy white and crimson hung upon the trellises, mingling their perfume with the sweet magnolias. Where the fountains tossed their bright waters in the warm sunlight, the tall white lilies grew in perfection of beauty; and down by the lake, in the shade of the weeping willows, the grass was starred with lilies-of-the-valley and sweet violets, and on the bosom of the lake floated white swans and water lilies. The brilliant orchids clung to the lichened rocks and filled the air with their rich

perfume and in a sheltered corner grew marguerites, forget-me-nots and quivering hairbells. On the southern wall, in wild profusion, bloomed the pink azalias, trailing arbutus and the white clematis with its feathery blooms, and other flowers as rare and sweet were blooming everywhere. In the shrubbery graceful statues gleamed. And in the marble basins gold and silver fishes were playing in the limpid waters.

"In my garden was a stately tower of red sandstone, half covered with vines. It was surrounded by a broad veranda, and little balconies appeared here and there in unexpected places. The one that I enjoyed most was near the top and was connected with my studio where I wrote rare gems in poetry and painted wonderful pictures, among them was the perfect face of 'Little Cherub.' Oh, could I paint that exquisite face as I painted it in my dreams! The delicate transparency of the skin, rivaling the soft tints of the sea-shell; the waving golden hair that held sunbeams imprisoned in its meshes; the profile as perfect as a cameo, and the splendor of the dark, laughing eyes, in whose depths I saw the longing for earthly joys blended with the mysteries of Paradise.

"My garden was full of singing birds. A nightingale sang in a linden tree close to my lofty balcony. White doves circled around the tower and reared their young in the lofty turrets. The orioles chose the beach trees for their hanging nests, the robins and the bluebirds loved the elms best. The bright-plumaged tropical birds had their homes in the palms and magnolias. The little linnet hid her tiny nest among the creamy roses on the trellises and all day long the scented air was throbbing with their music.

"I was not alone in my garden. I had two faithful companions who followed me wherever I went. A stately white stork and a beautiful Angora cat. If I seated myself the cat immediately curled himself up in my lap purring softly, while the stork stood beside me on one leg, always gazing solemnly at the fountains. They were pleasant companions and all was harmony within my vinedraped walls. But one day an evil thing appeared in my garden. I was sitting in a shady spot near the fountains when I saw a black reptile (nearly as large as my cat) upon the white gravel walk. resembled a toad but had the head of a serpent. My cat saw the reptile, arched his back and as he sprang upon the walk for closer inspection, the reptile leaped upon him and fastened his teeth in his pretty white throat. I hurried to the rescue of my pet. I put my foot upon the neck of the hideous thing and the cat escaped. Then I ground it beneath my feet, crushing it into the sand, but when I stepped aside expecting to see the thing crushed and dead, it glided away apparently unhurt, hissing as it went and giving me a vicious look from its glittering eyes. After that my garden gave me no pleasure. I was always looking for the reptile and although it might not appear, I

knew it was there hiding among the flowers. My cat was either a prisoner in the tower or I carried him in my arms to save him from his foe. But one day when I was in my studio he escaped. I looked from my balcony and saw him chasing butterflies down on the velvet lawn, when suddenly the reptile glided out from a bed of lilies and sprang upon my pet. It was near the fountain where the stork was standing in the sunshine pruning his feathers. When he heard my cry and the piteous mew of the cat he ruffled his feathers, made a whistling noise and flew to the rescue. The cat was saved and with a few strokes of his sharp beak the stork killed the reptile, then picking it up in his bill he tossed it over the garden wall.

"I went down into the garden and seated myself in my favorite nook near the fountain, with the cat purring in my lap and the stork standing beside me, harmony was restored; and I gazed with new joy upon the beauties that surrounded me. I saw far down the narrowing vista of the flower-bordered walk a little fairy form, all in white, dancing toward me. As she drew near I saw that it was 'Little Cherub,' her golden hair floating on the breeze, her eyes like stars, her face dimpling with laughter. In her hand she carried a bunch of great white lilies, more beautiful than any that bloomed in my garden. On her arm hung a wreath of white roses. As she passed, she tossed the lilies into my lap and the wreath around the neck of the stork, then throwing me a kiss, she

went dancing down the walk whirling as she went, to throw me kisses from her dimpled hands. As she disappeared in the shimmering foliage, I awoke. The room seemed full of the heavy fragrance of the flowers, and the echoing music of the singing birds still sounded in my ears. And was it a stray moonbeam that danced across my chamber-floor and was lost in the shadows outside my open window, or was it the fairy form of 'Little Cherub?'"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOST PRINCESS.

It was a wild March night but the shutters were closed and the fire burned brightly in the grate. Hope was seated in her favorite chair, watching sweet Miriam walking restlessly to and fro, now in the firelight, now in the shadow. She wore a crimson dress of soft material, in her belt was a bunch of white roses, her dark eyes were very bright and her cheeks softly red.

"How fair she is," thought Hope, "and no one to see her but me."

Suddenly the wind began howling down the wide fireplace and Miriam said: "Wild old March knows that April is coming to-morrow; so to-night he is giving us a farewell serenade. Hark! how he sweeps his Æolian harp and how weird are the echoes of his rollicking song among the turrets and swaying tree-tops. Listen to that wild crescendo, how the shrill upper notes and deep bass cords go thundering around the tower. Oh, I am so glad that April is coming to-morrow. This morning I heard a bluebird singing in the naked elms and caught the glint of his azure breast as he flew from tree to tree. Tell me Hope, what has the spring in store for me? Will it bring me joy or sorrow?"



LEONA



Hope was seated with her golden head resting against the purple cushions as she listened to Miriam with half-closed eyes and smiling lips, but as Miriam asked the question, "Will it bring me joy or sorrow?" she opened wide her blue eyes and looking for a moment into Miriam's face, she said, "Bring me the guitar, dear."

She took the guitar from Miriam's hand and after touching a few chords, she began singing joyously—

The spring will bring you joy, sweet one. Joy, joy, joy.

The birds are coming one by one Singing, joy, joy, joy!

The grasses and the tender leaves,
Sing, joy, joy !
'Tis echoed by the whispering breeze
Joy, joy, joy!

The blossoms too will join the song
Of joy, joy, joy!
'Tis coming dear, 'twill tarry long,
Your joy, joy, joy!

When Hope had finished her sorg Miriam's restlessness had vanished and she said, "Sweet Hope, without you I should die, your song has cheered my heart. Now, tell me a story, dear, of a noble prince and a beautiful princess, who are true to each other, true in spite of every adverse fate, so true that nothing can separate them, not even death, for is not love as eternal as Heaven? A story full of weird scenes, and at least one mystery, and, through it all let there be music, waving palms and the sound of the sea. You must make it so vivid, my dear, that I shall hear the music and scent the perfume of the tropical flowers."

Hope, watching her eager face, said, with a smile, "Are you not giving me a difficult task, Miriam?"

And she answered, "Nothing is difficult for you, my Hope, now hasten and tell me the story."

For a few moments Hope sat looking intently at the white roses in Miriam's belt as though seeking inspiration from them, then raising her eyes, she said, "I will tell you the story of 'The Lost Princess.'"

THE LOST PRINCESS.

"The noble Prince Adrian was betrothed in childhood to a princess of a distant realm by his father the king. The time was drawing near that they should wed but they had never looked upon each other's faces. The prince seemed to know his promised bride; for years he had seen her in his dreams and visions; a slender form of exquisite grace, shy dark eyes, soft dark hair, scarlet lips and skin of creamy fairness and a low voice, whose music thrilled his soul. When she first appeared he called her Princess Leonine, and she said, 'Call me not Leonine but Leona.' Together, in his dreams they roamed through the parks and glens of his ancestral home; together in his white skiff, they glided down the placid river, past smiling

villas, stately castles and little islands with their waving willows, singing as they went floating down the winding stream. On moonlight nights he often saw her standing beneath the trees looking up at the stars, or in the firelight he would see her face smiling upon him; and when he wandered alone in the forest he would hear her singing some low melody, and, in the dim shady distance, see her white form flitting among the trees and often, when awakening in the silence of the night, he would see her standing in the moonlit spaces of his room.

"In visions or dreams she was always in white, her face serene and sweet and the love-light ever shining from her starry eyes. And all through these years of waiting, Prince Adrian walked blameless before his people and they loved and revered this fair young god, their future king. He listened not to the voice of the tempter, no matter how alluring, for said he, 'I must keep my soul white, that I may have nothing to hide when I look into the innocent eyes of my beloved princess.'

"When at last the time of probation was ended with joy unspeakable, he sailed away to that distant realm to claim his promised bride, and, after a long and perilous journey, he reached the land of palms and stood within the stately palace of the king, waiting with wildly beating heart, for the princess to appear. He had not waited long when the silken portieres were raised by a jeweled hand

and a magnificent woman stood before him. Very tall, with a form of splendid development, her olive skin was like velvet, her full lips were as red as the rubies she wore on her neck and arms. Her heavy-lidded black eyes were fixed upon his face with undisguised admiration, as she came to meet him. With indolent grace she gave him her hand and said: 'Welcome, Prince Adrian, thrice welcome!'

"He bowed low before her, touching his lips to her hand and said: 'Is it the sister of the Princess Leonine that I have the honor to salute?'

"At these words she snatched her hand from grasp, drew her splendid form to its full height, and, looking at him with blazing eyes, she said: 'I am the Princess Leonine.'

"At these words he grew pale and a sudden faintness seized him, but he quickly recovered himself and said: 'You forget, princess, that I have never looked upon your face until now, so how could I recognize you. I had not expected to see so magnificent a woman in my mind. I had pictured the princess Leonine as petite.'

"She bowed coldly in acknowledgment of the compliment, waved him to a seat, and, half reclining upon a silken divan, she watched him furtively, narrow-eyed but intent, while she questioned him of his country and of his journey and he answered her automatically, while from his heart there surged this continual cry:

"'Where are you, where are you, my little Leona?"

"As he was growing uneasy beneath the scrutiny of those narrow eyes, there came an unlooked-for diversion. Suddenly a leopard bounded through the open window and stood looking at the prince. He was a splendid creature, sleek and spotted. His great yellow eyes glowed upon the prince as he lashed his tail in suppressed fury. The prince was speechless for a moment with mingled emotions of surprise, admiration and terror, then he sprang to his feet looking about him for some weapon with which to protect the princess and himself, when the princess said:

"'Calm yourself, Prince Adrian, this is my pet cat, he will not harm you."

"Then she said to the leopard, 'Come hither, Leo,' and he obeyed, fawning upon her and purring loudly and licking her hands. When she tired of his caresses, she said, 'Down, Leo,' and he dropped at her feet, still purring and playing with the ruby buckles of her slippers.

"After a half hour of almost unbroken silence between the prince and princess, she preferring to look at the prince, rather than to talk with him; there was another diversion even more startling than the first. Suddenly the soft purring of the leopard was changed to an ominous growling, his bright eyes were turned toward the open doorway, while he beat the floor with his long tail.

"As the prince looked toward the door, for a mo-

ment his heart stood still with terror. With half its glittering length in the room and half upon the veranda, was an immense serpent. When it saw the leopard, it came no farther but lay across the threshold, hissing as it showed its forked tongue, its emerald eyes fixed upon the cat.

"Again the princess said: 'Calm yourself, my dear prince, it is only another of my pets, harmless, I assure you. Be quiet, Leo,' and the leopard lay quiet, but with its angry eyes still turned toward the snake.

"'My pets are not fond of each other,' said the princess, 'but thus far they have only expressed their dislike by growls and hisses; for the leopard knows that the snake can crush, and the snake knows that the leopard has teeth and claws; but some day their hatred will overcome their fear of fangs and coils, then they will destroy each other. My pets are like human beings, they know how to love and they know how to hate.'

"To the prince this first interview with the princess seemed like a horrible dream, from which he longed to awaken. It left a vivid picture upon his mind never to be forgotten. The warm, languorous air, heavy with the fragrance of the tropical flowers, the half barbarous splendor of the spacious room, with its polished floor, its oriental rugs, and silken hangings; the snake, glittering in the sunlight, as it lay half asleep across the threshold, the tawny leopard lying at the feet of that dark, beautiful woman, who, to the prince, seemed to

possess both the nature of the leopard and the snake, the stealthy movements of the half-naked slaves, as their dark forms appeared and disappeared, passing the open doorway.

"That night, in his dreams, he saw Leona, pale and sad. With tearful eyes she looked at him, holding out her arms toward him, but when he approached her, she vanished.

"He arose the next morning with a heavy heart, he was already tired of this strange country, and longed for the hills, the vales, and the cooling breezes of his native land. He dreaded another interview with the Princess Leonine. He knew he could never wed with her, for his heart was already Leona's. But who was Leona, and where was she? He never doubted for a moment her existence, for had he not unmistakable evidence? Spirit communicating with spirit; soul speaking with soul. The spirit knows no bonds, the soul knows no barriers. Yes, she lived and he loved her, and some day they would meet.

"At the close of another day much like the first, the prince and the Princess Leonine, with the other members of the household, were seated upon the veranda, watching the dark, lithe forms of the half-naked slaves, in their fantastic dance under the colored lights upon the lawn, and finally the sorceres came and, through strange machinations, changed their ribbons into snakes that glided across the lawn and disappeared in the shrubbery; and tossing white rosebuds into the air, they were

changed into little singing birds, that fluttered for awhile, then were lost in the foliage of the laurels.

"Suddenly from out the shadows stepped an old woman, tall and gaunt, her face haggard and colorless, and her eyes blazing in their deep sockets. The men fell back as she appeared. She stood for a moment looking about her and then approached one of the frightened slaves, waving her wand about him and as she crooned in dismal tones, he fell upon his face and a gray vapor gathered around him, and when it cleared away, a black dog was crouching at the feet of the sorceress, whining piteously. After a moment of intense silence, the slaves fled shrieking from her presence. After standing for awhile with her firey eyes fixed upon the shuddering group on the veranda, she began waving her wand over the dog, still whining at her feet. As she crooned her weird song, the gray vapor gathered around the dog and as it cleared away, the slave sprang to his feet, gave the woman one terrified glance, then fled shrieking from her presence as the others had done. And the sorceress disappeared in the shadows as suddenly as she had come. Then the Princess Leonine called one of the slaves and said, 'Bring the harp and the singer, nothing but music can dispel this horror.'

"The slave soon returned with the harp and following him was a slender girlish form, in white and as she came forward into the light, the prince, speechless with joyful surprise, looked into the face of Leona; their eyes met, heart spoke to heart, there was no need of words. The look that passed between them had not escaped the eye of the Princess Leonine, and she said sharply to the girl:

"' Why do you wait, touch the harp and sing."

"Then she swept her white fingers over the strings and began singing in a low, sweet voice, the notes quivering then swelling into rich melody, floating out upon the air and echoing through the grove.

Oh, love, sacred, benign!

To my soul what heavenly bliss 'tis bringing;
In my ears the bridal bells are ringing;
And a little bird within my heart is singing
A hymn of love divine.

My love thine ear incline,
Hark to the song that from my heart is welling,
List to the story that my bird is telling,
The little bird that in my heart is dwelling—
This loving heart of mine.

As I quaff love's ruby wine
The silent stars, my ecstasy divining
For me increase the splendor of their shining,
The vines caress my feet around them twining,
They know that I am thine.

The blossoms, too, define,
This mystery, this bliss, my heart beguiling,
They look into my face all brightly smiling,
And softly exclaim, the stars and grasses rivaling
Oh love, thou art sublime!

What holy joy is mine!
The tendrils of my heart round thine are clinging,
My spirit, its glad flight to thee is winging,
And my little heart-bird still is singing, singing
Of this love, this love divine.

"As the last note still quivered on the air, a nightingale burst forth into song and they sang on and on together, the girl and the bird, pouring out their hearts in rapturous melody, until the Princess Leonine, waving her jeweled hand, cried: 'Cease! I am tired of the music.' And as Leona left the lawn, the princess saw the look of tender admiration in the face of the prince as his eyes followed her retreating form and noted how tremulous was his voice as he asked:

"" Who is the beautiful singer?"

"'A princess of a small eastern realm,' she replied, 'taken captive, when, through victorious warfare, her father's realm was added to our kingdom.'

"The prince could not sleep that night, his heart was so full of joy, not unmixed with gloomy forebodings, that his joy could not dispel. He arose early thenextmorning and as he walked across the lawn, the weird scene of the past night with its beautiful ending, seemed like some marvelous dream or vision of the night.

"The scene that spread out before him was of rare beauty. The tropical flowers were blooming everywhere in luxurious profusion. The trees were festooned with glossy vines, their tendrils gently swaying in the breezes. The ocean lay calm as a lake in the sunlight. A few white skiffs were drifting upon its bosom, and in the distance was a ship, faintly outlined against the pale blue sky. The prince bared his head and looked about him; the flowers seemed to smile upon him, and all the bright-winged birds were singing love-songs in the waving palms. His face was full of joy, and he said aloud:

"'Yesterday I saw no beauty in this scene, but to-day it is perfect, for Leona is near,' and as he spoke, he saw her standing a little way off looking out across the ocean. He quickly joined her and they clasped hands for the first time and looked into each others eyes, reading there the sweet old story that their lips had not yet spoken.

"'Come with me down to the lake,' said the prince, still holding her hand, 'I have much to say

to you."

"And when they had reached the lake and seated themselves under the laurels, he told her how he had known her all these years in his dreams and visions, and she, too, in dreams and visions had seen his face and heard his voice, and knew him last night under the colored lights, and sang for him as she had never sang before, Then they talked of the future, building shining castles to the skies.

"'Three days from now,' said the prince, 'a ship sails from this port that will carry us to our northern home; we will be married on shipboard.'

"As they were about to part, the prince said: 'Last night I had evil forebodings, and even your presence, my dear, cannot drive them away.'

"'Fear not, Adrian,' said she, 'nothing can separate for long, those who truly love; there are no limitations for the soul. Were you lost in the fastnesses of the mountains, or wandering helplessly in the recesses of the forests, or cast alone upon some bleak island of the sea, my soul, like a bird, would fly to thee guided by love, unwavering in its flight, and folding not its wings until it entered the open portals of its home, within thy heart.'

"'Your words cheer my soul,' said the prince, and with one long embrace they parted, little thinking of the dread experiences that awaited them before they would meet again.

"When they had gone, from out the shrubbery stepped the Princess Leonine, her eyes were blazing and her face was white with rage, as she hissed: 'Prince Adrian, you will never see Leona's face again.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WHISPERING SHELL.

"THAT night the Princess Leonine was alone in an upper room of the palace. She was impatiently pacing to and fro across the room, often stopping to lift the heavy hangings at the door, listening intently, and when her expected visitor appeared it was the gaunt sorceress who had plied her arts upon the lawn the night before. Leonine approached her and asked:

"'Can you tell me why I sent for you, wise sorceress?'

She answered not, but grasped the hand of the princess and closed her eyes, rubbing the hand softly between her palms, and said in a low, crooning voice, 'You love the fair prince from the northland, and wish me to destroy your rival. Then opening her eyes and dropping the hand of the princess, she asked, 'What of the dark-eyed prince you promised to wed?'

"'I love him no more,' answered the princess impatiently. 'I will wed none but the Prince Adrian; he shall be mine. Oh, he is so beautiful! His skin is like the milk of the cocoanut, his hair is like burnished gold, and his blue eyes shame my sapphires."

"'Why have you sent for me, Princess Leonine?"

interrupted the woman. 'The Princess Leona is a prisoner of war, you have a right to take her life

if it pleases you.'

"'But it does not please me,' answered the princess. 'If I take her life, her freed spirit would scorn Heaven to stay with him; and with her soul hovering near him, I could never win his love. You must transform her into a fish, and imprison her in this shell,' taking a beautiful shell from the table, 'and then in my ship you shall sail toward the setting sun, and when three days out drop the shell into the sea, and there, beneath fathoms and fathoms of water, her imprisoned spirit can reach him no more.'

"Upon the table beside the shell were two small ebony caskets. The princess took a golden key from her belt and unlocked them. And when the sorceress drew near she saw that they were filled with sparkling jewels of great value, Her fiery eyes gloated over them, and she looked eagerly at the princess, who said, 'You shall have one casket to-night, and the other when you return from midocean, if you do your work well.'

"She grasped one of the caskets in her bony hand, and said, with a harsh laugh, 'Never fear, the work shall be well done."

- "'Follow me,' said the princess, 'it must be done to-night.'
- "Through corridor after corridor sped the illassorted pair, until the princess stopped before a door in the east wing. In her hand she held a key

with which she unlocked the door and entered, followed by the sorceress.

"It was a large room, heavy and sombre; a colored lamp shed a faint light in the centre of the room, increasing the dark shadows in the corners, Upon a bed, beneath a crimson canopy, lay the beautiful form of Princess Leona.

"'She will not awake,' said Leonine, 'for I have given her drugged wine.'

"The hard face of the sorceress softened for a moment as she looked upon the fair, innocent face of the sleeping girl, and, turning to the princess Leonine, she said. 'And you, a young girl like herself, wish me to destroy her, it is not yet too late to save your soul from this black crime. Here, I will return the jewels,' holding out the casket toward her.

"For an instant Leonine stood irresolute, looking upon the sleeping form before her, but as she looked, a smile dimpled the face of the sleeper and she murmured softly, 'Adrian, Adrian,' then the face of the princess hardened and she said to the sorceress, 'Now I will leave you, see that your work is well done.'

"The next morning there was great consternation at the palace; the captive Princess Leona had disappeared. The Princess Leonine offered great rewards for her safe return, then the unavailing search began. The Prince Adrian searched day and night, scarcely eating or sleeping; and one day, while standing on the beach, he heard the

voice of Leona, calling him across the deep, again and again; she called, 'Adrian! Adrian!' And that night he sailed away across the sea and by night and by day he heard her voice calling to him from the depths, 'Adiran! Adrian!'

"After months of fruitless search in that strange land beyond the sea he again stood upon the beach and heard the voice of his lost love, calling to him from the waters. One night there was a wild storm upon the ocean; the waves rolled mountain high, sweeping inland and threatening the quaint old city with destruction. But the next morning all was calm and as Prince Adrian walked upon the beach, he saw a beautiful shell at his feet; he picked it up and holding it to his ear, but instead of the sound of the sea, he seemed to hear a voice whispering from within, and he said, 'Beautiful whispering shell, are you trying to tell me of Leona?' As he held the shell in his hand a sweet peace, that he had not known for months, calmed his soul and a longing for home took possession of his heart and the next day he sailed toward the north, carrying the whispering shell with him. And through that long voyage, he heard no more the voice of Leona calling from the deep. There was joy in the palace and joy in the realm when the prince, whom they had mourned as dead, returned after his long absence, and long silence. When the first joyful greeting was over, they asked for the princess.

"He answered sadly, 'She is lost and no one can find her.'

"When those who loved him saw how changed he was, they said, 'The prince is always sad, and when he smiles his smile is sadder than tears.'

"His grief for the lost princess was touching because of its unselfishness. So kind and thoughtful was he of those about him, looking after the poor of his realm, alleviating, as far as possible, all suffering and distress, and he was very kind to young lovers, and very good to little children; and all his people mourned with him because of his great sorrow, and at night when the little ones repeated their prayers, they asked the kind Father to restore the lost princess to their beloved prince.

"One day a young lord, from a near city, who knew the prince and loved him well, came to the palace and asked for an interview with the prince. During the interview he said, 'I have heard, Prince Adrian, of your great sorrow for the lost princess and I am come to tell you of a strange woman that has lately appeared in our city; she possesses the wonderful power of being able to tell of the past also of the future and to penetrate the mysterious and secret things that are hidden from others. I believe, oh prince, that she can tell you of the lost princess.'

"The prince sprang to his feet, his face flushing with hope and said, 'I will return with you, my lord, if you will take me to this woman.'

"They started immediately and when they reached the city, the lord, without delay, conducted the prince to the dwelling of this gifted woman. He waited in a lofty room, with hangings of crimson and gold. The rich carpet, the velvet chairs, the lamp shades were all of the same crimson tone; a fire glowed in the deep grate and a few rare pictures hung upon the walls. He had hardly finished his survey of the room, when the woman appeared; he arose and they stood looking at each other for a moment, without speaking, and the prince never forgot the impression the woman made upon him at the first moment of their meeting.

"A tall, slender form in black of soft clinging material, the black lace scarf at the neck was fastened with a large opal, leaving the white throat bare. Of her age no one could judge. Her soft wavy hair was perfectly white and coiled high upon her shapely head and ornamented with an arrow of black onyx and opals and she held a wand in her long white hand. The oval face, with its perfect features, was serene and colorless as marble; there was not a furrow or line of age upon her face, and yet it seemed that the joys, the sorrows, the experiences of all lives were centered in this one face and her wonderful eyes were speaking the things her lips could not utter.

"In a moment she approached the prince and took his hand in hers and gazed fixedly into his eyes, then dropping his hand she motioned him to be seated, then seating herself beside him and placing his hand upon the cushioned arm of the chair, she laid her hand upon his, and, with the other hand began waving the wand before their faces with rhythmical motion. As the prince felt a drowsiness stealing over him, he looked at the woman; her face was ghastly white, her eyes were closed and her lips moving, then he knew no more until he felt a cool hand stroking his forehead and heard a musical voice saying, 'Awake, prince, awake!'

"With an effort he opened his eyes and the woman stood before him smiling. There was a new light in her wonderful eyes and she said in joyous tones, 'Be sad no more, oh, prince, the lost princess is found.'

"Then said the prince eagerly, 'Where is she? oh, tell me, kind friend, for my heart is weary with waiting.'

"'You shall see her soon,' said the woman come at this hour to-morrow and bring with you the whispering shell that you found on the beach of a foreign shore.'

"Then with a wave of her hand she dismissed him. Bewildered he walked with unsteady steps down the broad stairway, and his friend, waiting for him below, grasped his hand and said, 'I need not ask if you have good news of the princess, your face tells the tale.'

"The prince returned to the palace that night. Conflicting emotions of joy, hope, doubt and fear,

drove away all slumber from his couch; the night seemed endless but the morning dawned at last and he hastened to the city, carrying with him the precious shell, and at the appointed hour stood again in the crimson room in the presence of the woman who had promised to restore the lost princess. When he gave her the shell she held it to her ear for a moment, then with a smile, she laid it upon the carpet and motioning the prince to a seat, she said, 'Fix your eyes upon the shell, speak not, move not, and you shall witness a wonderful transformation.'

"Then she began waving her wand over the shell, and the prince saw it slowly opening in the centre where the two edges, like the teeth of a saw, closed together, and a pale silvery mist issued from the shell, increasing in volume and density, until it reached half way to the lofty ceiling. In the center of this luminous mist, there appeared a slender line of white, gradually widening and changing into a shadowy human form, becoming more and more distinct as the mist faded away, until the fair form of lost Leona met the enraptured gaze of the prince. She stood beside the open shell in her white garments, looking about her in a dazed manner, until her eyes rested upon the prince, then she held out her arms and murmured:

"'Adrian, my love."

"The prince, who had been speechless and unable to move, sprang to his feet and clasped her in his arms, And they both knelt at the feet of the woman who had restored them to happiness, kissing her hands, weeping and blessing her. And she, caressing them with her white fingers, said:

"'I am as happy as you, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' There are two great forces in the world, one is to destroy, the other to restore. Be not satisfied because you are not of those who destroy; but stand as white and shining lights in the noble ranks of the unselfish ones who give, give, give, that the world may be brighter and better."

CHAPTER XV.

THE LILY-BULB ROOMS.

EASTER morning dawned fair and bright. As soon as the sun appeared above the Shining Heights, Miriam and Hope left the tower, and crossing the fields and the purple hills, they soon reached the quaint old village and entered the little stone chapel. And when they were seated, they felt stealing into their hearts, the holy calm that pervaded the ancient sanctuary. The air was heavy with incense from the swinging censers. The subdued light from the tapers burning upon the altar, only half revealed the dim paintings upon the walls, and the statues in the shadowy niches. When the music of the old organ rolled forth, filling all the perfumed spaces with solemn melody, and the voices of the invisible choir began chanting their hymns of praise, Hope's face was illumined, and the tears fell upon Miriam's flushed cheeks; and when the last joyful strain of the easter anthem had died away, and the girls stepped out into the sunshine, they stood for a moment looking about them with bewildered faces.

They had forgotten for a brief season, that any thing existed but the ancient chapel, and the sacred music that filled their souls with holy ecstasy.

They lingered for awhile in the village, then turned their faces toward home, and as they walked across the brown meadows, with here and there a hint of green, the bluebirds were singing, and they found a few violets blooming along the winding stream. The brisk walk across the flelds, in the bracing air, had brought roses and diamonds into the cheeks and eyes of the happy girls, and their voices had a new and joyous ring. When they reached the tower the sun was just sinking behind the Shining Heights. And now it was evening again and very cool. The lamps had not been lighted in Miriam's sitting-room, but the room was cheerful in the flickering firelight. Hope stood before the grate and the light played around her graceful form, giving a new charm to its stateliness; and played with the white gleam and sparkle of her jeweled hands, and touched the braids that crowned her fair head with ruddy gold. The moonlight flooded the south window, and where it met and mingled with the firelight, Miriam stood among the lilies, the fairest of them all. Hope had been watching her, and she broke the silence by saying:

"Little Miriam, you look like a fairy in your

white dress among your white lilies."

"You promised me a story this evening, let it be a fairy tale. You shall be my mother and I will be your little girl, just for to-night, and you will tell your little one a fairy tale. Now seat yourself, sweet mother, and I will bring my stool and sit down at your feet and lay my arms across your lap, just this way, and listen with wide eyes to the wonderful tale. I can already see the fairies dancing in the firelight," she added with a laugh.

Hope was silent for a few moments and then

Hope was silent for a few moments and then said, "My little girl, I will now weave you a fairy tale from your easter lilies and your fairies dancing in the firelight, and it shall be called 'The Lily-Bulb Rooms.'"

THE LILY-BULB ROOMS.

"In the midst of an unexplored sea is a little island of exquisite beauty. No storm ever beat on its silvery strands, for the sea is always calm. No grass grows upon this island, but the ground is covered with moss, deep and soft; nothing was ever so green as this mossy carpet. Little feathery palms are ever waving in the fragrant breezes; no other trees grow on the island, and of flowers there are nothing but lilies-wonderful, great white lilies filling the air with richest perfume and these lilies, never fade. Little birds with brilliant plumage warble in the palm trees and the air is all a quiver with bright-winged butterflies. This island is the home of the fairies, they have lived here for years, yea for ages; they are good fairies and beautiful; they never grow old and they never die. Each fairy has a lily for her home. The white room in the lily cup is as lovely as a dream. And from the white room, is a spiral stairway within the stem of the lily, leading down to a room in the bulb, a little room hung in pale green and lighted with fireflies. At night, when the fairies enter their homes, the lilies close their white cups, shutting out the dew or gentle rain.

"In the centre of the island is a terraced mound, covered with a mossy carpet, and upon the mound grows a lily, many times larger than the others. This is the home of the beautiful and beloved queen of the fairies. Here, in her white palace, with her maids of honor, she holds her court. The white throne-room is spacious and beautiful and so are the lily-bulb rooms down in the cool earth. The fairies weave their dainty dresses from the pink and white sea-weed that floats in with the tide; they also use it for food, eating it with the milk of the cocoanuts. The cocoanuts that grow on the palm trees are no larger than filberts and the little gray squirrels open them for the fairies. The squirrels are used for steeds, they are very fleet but gentle. They often carry the fairies to the top of the trees, where the most delicious fruit is found, and there they love to sit eating fruit and talking to the birds. Fairies understand the language of birds. Quite often a bird says to a fairy, 'Seat yourself between my wings and I will give you a ride in the upper air,' and no fairy was ever known to refuse a treat so rare.

"One day, when the fairies were dancing on the green, singing as they danced a little merman, floating on the waves, heard them singing and watched them for hours, but they saw him not. When he returned to his home, in the coral caves, beneath the sea, he told the king of the mermen about the island and the beautiful fairies. He was a wicked little king and he said to the man that brought the news, 'To-morrow I will take a hundred men and you shall guide us to the island and each man must capture a fairy, but the queen of the fairies shall be mine, and they shall sing and dance for us in our coral halls beneath the waves.'

"The next morning the fairy queen from her white veranda, saw the hundred mermen all in green, landing on the beach.

"'To the lilies! to the lilies!' she cried, and each fairy fled to her lily home and down the stairway, hiding herself in the lily-bulb room, and the lilies folded their white cups, so when the little mermen marched to the centre of the island, all was silent save the twitter of the frightened birds in the top of the palm trees. The mermen searched everywhere, but not a fairy did they find.

"Then the little king swore a big oath and said, to the guide, 'Find me the fairies, or this night you shall be food for the fishes.' The fairies hearing his terrible voices trembled until the lilies shook on their stems. After searching the island again and again, the king said to the guide sneeringly, 'You saw the butterflies and mistook them for fairies and just as they were leaving the island, the king said, pointing to the lilies, 'What strange plants are these, with their long green leaves

and their long white buds? We have nothing like them.' Then said he to the guide, 'take up one of the plants carefully, without harming the roots, and I will plant it in my garden under the sea."

"And the man did as he was bidden, and they carried away the lily with the poor little fairy a prisoner in her lily-bulb room.

"It was a long time after the mermen left the island before the fairies dared to come forth, and when they did they discovered the loss of the lily and they cried: 'It is Freda, sweet little Freda, that is gone!' Then they wrung their tiny hands and threw themselves upon the ground, weeping and tearing their golden tresses. It was their first grief, they had never known that there was any sorrow in the world, and where their tears moistened the ground, there sprang up new flowers that had never bloomed there before. They were passion flowers, as purple as Freda's eyes.

"But what of poor little Freda? The king of the mermen planted the lily in his garden close to the coral cliffs and little Freda was a prisoner in her lily-bulb room, with only the fireflies for company; and she had to eat her pretty sea-weed dresses to keep herself from starving. But after many weeks, that seemed like years to poor Freda, one day a ray of light penetrated the spiral stairway and Freda, with wildly beating heart, crept up just a little way, and saw the blue sky through the open lily. Then she bounded up the stairway to the white room and found that the lily had grown up,

up, through fathoms and fathoms of water, seeking her natural element, the air and sunshine.

"'What shall I do now?' said Freda, after the first joyful moments had past, 'Here is the ocean all around me and my island home is far away.' But a little way off she saw a dolphin playing in the water; she called him and when he came, she told him her story, and he said:

"Leap upon my back, little one, and I will carry you home."

It was a joyful ride for Freda and when they reached the island the fairies danced around her in joy and carried her in their arms to the palace of the queen. Then they held a festival of rejoicing that lasted many days. They invited the good dolphin, not only to the festival, but to make the island his home. He thanked them kindly but said the atmosphere was too dry for him, he preferred a damp climate. He was always a friend to the fairies and gave them many a ride on his back. He would carry a thousand at a time and they often visited the spot where the white lily rears her stately head above the waves and the fairies love to listen down the snowy tube, to the mermen laughing and singing in their home beneath the sea. Freda now lives in the white palace of the queen, the tiniest and sweetest of all her maids of honor, and the good dolphin guards the island, so that the wicked little mermen can molest the fairies no more. Although, Freda returned and happiness was restored, still it can never be quite the same again on the beautiful island, for blooming there are the purple flowers, as fadeless as the lilies, ever reminding the fairies that there is sin and sorrow in the world."

CHAPTER XVI.

LITTLE BLOSSOM.

IT was a calm evening in June; Miriam and Hope were seated upon one of the upper balconies of the tower silently watching the white skiffs floating upon the silvery bosom of the lake. spires, the turrets, the white walls of the city beyond the lake were flooded with moonlight and the faint sound of distant bells wafted in on the breeze, mingled with the music from a skiff near the shore. Miriam and Hope watching the skiff as it reached the landing, saw two men and two girls in white step from the boat and they continued their song as they walked, two by two, along the narrow path, leading past the tower. And as they approached, the words of a familiar song reached Miriam's ears and they brought to mind one other perfect night when she listened shyly to a beloved voice beneath her balcony, singing the words that now smite her ears, falling so lightly from the lips of the gays ones passing by:

Come out into the moonlight love,

The night is calm and fair

The stars are smiling from above;

There's perfume in the air.

Come love, come, come, come,

I wait; I wait;

'Tis late; 'tis late;

Come love, come, come, come



LITTLE BLOSSOM

*

As the last notes died away in the distance, tears sprang to Miriam's eyes, and Hope saw them glistening in the moonlight and asked:

"Why are you sad, my Miriam?"

And she answered:

"It is the song that makes me sad, but I will think of it no more. Tell me a story, Hope; let it be a true story. I am afraid, my dear, that your beautiful stories, all ending like fairy tales, are not true to life. There was a time when I would have believed them true, but, alas! that time is past and I am so young," she said, sadly, "to have lost faith in humanity. Oh, for the perfect faith that I once possessed! The world was so beautiful to me then; my little world, encompassed by the purple hills, the lake, the woods and the Shining Heights. Then Peace and Content were my companions; but where are they now? I know that they will never come back to me again. What sweet dreams I had in those calm, pleasant days; I dreamed of love that would crown my life with joy inexpressible; the beginning of heaven on earth, and reaching out into eternity. I believed that man, created in God's own image, was a part of the divine; that to him a woman's heart was a sacred thing, and not a toy to be lightly handled, then cast aside as a worthless bauble. Oh, my false love! if only the bitter memories remained, I might forget, but sweet memories are ever lingering near to mock me with fair visions of the past."

"Talk no more of the past," said Hope, "but

turn your eyes toward the future; the fair, unexplored future is still before you. Now, listen, dear, and I will tell you a true story—the story of Little Blossom."

LITTLE BLOSSOM.

"They were known at the grim old tenement house as 'Little Blossom and the grandmother.' Four years had passed since they came to the old house and rented a couple of rooms on the second floor. When their effects were carried in they seemed to be quite out of keeping with the surroundings, as did Little Blossom and the grandmother. They had a few pieces of furniture, somewhat worn, but rich and antique, and oriental rugs and curtains that had once been very handsome. There was a box of books, several rare gems in oil paintings, a guitar and an outfit of artist's materials. Little Blossom was thirteen, but so tiny that she seemed much younger. A little sprite, as merry as a lark, with wide, brown eyes, like a robbin's, and her small head was covered with a mass of short, chestnut curls; her cheeks were round, pink and dimpled like a baby's, and dimples were continually playing around the sweet red mouth. The grandmother was stately and gentle; her calm, fine face was unwrinkled, but her soft waving hair was white, and she wore it high upon her head, fastened with a silver comb. The people that lived in the old tenement house were very poor, but respectable. Little Blossom and the grandmother, while searching for cheaper lodgings, found this short, narrow street, quiet and clean, and it seemed safe and far removed from the noise and dust of the poverty-stricken districts of the great city. The new-comers were very interesting, not only to the people of the house where they had taken up their abode, but to the whole neighborhood. As Blossom and her grandmother took their morning walks, they were followed by many admiring and curious eyes. The women said the grandmother looked like a queen and the little one was a fairy.

"'It is plain to be seen,' said the women, 'that they have once been grand people and rich, and it is harder for them to be poor than for us, who have never known anything but poverty.

"In a little while, Blossom knew every one in the neighborhood and she visited them all, but her visits were very short; she flashed in and out of the humble homes like a bright-winged bird or a ray of sunshine, and every one loved her. Blossom had her hours of study and recited her lessons to the grandmother, whose delicate fingers were always busy weaving the filmy laces that gave bread and shelter to her and little Blossom. They were everything to each other, this white-haired woman and little girl. At night when Blossom saw her beloved grandmother, pale and tired from bending all day over the laces, kissing her fondly, she would say, 'Poor mother, you are working too hard, but by and by you shall rest and I, with my

brush, will take care of you. I know that I shall paint such beautiful pictures that no one can help buying them.'

"In two years after they came to the old tenement house, the grandmother's eyes began to fail, and in a little while, she could see no longer to weave the laces, then they moved to the third floor because the rent was less. The day they moved, with the help of the good people in the house, Blossom laughed and sang as she tripped up the winding stairs with the light things that she could carry and kept them all laughing at her merry jokes.

"'The higher the rooms are, the lower they are,' said she, and standing upon the upper landing, she called down to those below her, 'Farewell, my humble friends, henceforth mother and I will move in higher circles.'

"They all joined in her merry laugh, but there were tears in their eyes and a kind-faced Irish woman said, as she wiped her tears with her apron, 'The swate darlint, the swate darlint, how she thries to make the best of it all.'

"That evening when Blossom and the grandmother had put the rooms in order, and were seated at their frugal meal, Blossom said cheer fully, 'Mother, I believe it is more healthful and pleasanter up here. The rooms are the same size and we still have our balcony. I really could not live without a balcony. It is there, on moonlight nights, that I have my most beautiful visions and build my shining castles to the clouds with the old wooden balcony for their foundations, but now I have something to do besides building air castles; to-morrow I am going out to sell the flowers that I have painted, we shall soon have plenty of money. My designs for Christmas cards and Easter cards will surely bring us money. Didn't I tell you, mother, that I would take care of you some day?'

"'Yes, my child, and may God keep my little girl in His tender care."

"The grandmother was greatly troubled, as she thought of Blossom going out alone in the city to sell her flowers, but the kind-hearted Irish woman, on the lower floor, discovering the grandmother's anxiety, said that her boy Jimmy should go with Blossom for protection. Jimmy was only eleven years old, but very large for his age. He was devoted to Little Blossom and she was fond of him; he was a nice-looking boy and very bright; his hair was red but not a brick-red, it was the color of a gold-fish's back and each separate hair seemed to have a mission of its own to perform in the way of curling. His mouth was large, but his teeth might be the envy of a Fifth Avenue belle, so white and even were they. His face was freckled but his cheeks were round and red, and he had big, honest blue eyes, a pleasant voice and nice manners. Those trips through the city with Little Blossom were the delight of Jimmy's heart; he seemed two inches taller and had a very protecting air as he walked beside her down the narrow street, carrying the

portfolio of precious pictures that were to pay the rent and feed Little Blossom and the grandmother.

"Jimmy was a bootblack by profession, but when he had attained to the honorable position of escort to Little Blossom, he announced to his fond mother and his admiring companions, the boys of the neighborhood, that he was going out of the bootblacking business, as he thought it was not respectful to Miss Blossom, for him to escort her through the city one day and the next day to stand on the corners of the streets yelling, 'Shine!' to the passers-by. 'From now on,' said Jimmy, 'I am a newsboy and everybody knows that the newspaper business is respectable.'

"The painted flowers were very beautiful but not so easy to sell as Blossom had thought. She and Jimmy would start out in the morning with the portfolio of paintings, exquisite little gems in water colors and oil. As she tripped away, rosy and hopeful, with a pleasant 'Good-morning! and Good-by!" to the people as they passed down the narrow street, their prayers for her safety and success followed her out into the jostle and turmoil of the great city. But day after day she returned pale and weary, and not one picture missing from the portfolio. And all along the street, they would ask, 'What luck, what luck, Miss Blossom?'

"'No luck to-day,' she would answer, 'but I am sure that I will sell them to-morrow.'

"And just as their last penny was gone, she came home one night with an empty portfolio and a few dollars in her purse. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks were flushed and Jimmy's face was a reflection of hers, and they all knew without asking, when they saw those two bright faces, that the pictures were sold. Jimmy waved the empty portfolio to the people as they passed along the street. Blossom smiled, but said nothing, until she reached her own door.

"'Look at the blessed darlint," said Jimmy's mother, 'she has sold her pictures.'

"'Yes, they are all gone,' said Blossom joyfully. Then running up the stairs, she burst into the room where her grandmother was sitting, threw the empty portfolio at her feet and the purse into her lap, laughing and crying as she embraced her. She had found a place where she could sell her pictures, but at a mere pittance; it was barely enough for a meagre existence for the two. Before the year was ended, they were obliged to move to the fourth floor, because the rent was less. And at this second moving, Blossom was as blythe and merry as at the last. She told the people in the house that it was her sixteenth birthday and they were going to celebrate the great event by taking a trip.

"'And we shall not return,' she said, 'as my health demands a higher altitude, and next year you may see us moving out on the roof, where we will pitch our tent far removed from the sordid things of earth.'

"'She is an angel,' said the lame woman on the

second floor, 'That is true, that is true,' echoed voices all around her.

"The words reached the ears of Little Blossom and the tears sprang to her eyes as she murmured, 'They called me an angel, they believe in me, they love me, oh, I must try to be very good!'

"When the rooms were in order, Blossom carried her flowers out on the balcony and then called, 'Mother, mother, come out and see what a beautiful view we have.' And as the fond mother stood beside her with her arm around her slender waist, Blossom pointed to the scene spread out before them. The church spires and towers of the city, touched by the rays of the setting sun, glittered like silver and there was a glimpse of the shining river, and a faint outline of the statue upon the island.

"'Every night we shall see the light of the torch,' said Blossom. 'The world is very beautiful,' mother dear, and God is so good to us.'

"The arm tightened around the sweet, girlish form, a tear fell upon the cheek of the mother but her heart was so full that she could not speak. And thus they stood silently gazing upon the scene before them; the roar of the city mingled with the sound of bells, reached their ears, and, as the evening chimes rose clear and sweet above the rest, the face of the girl was illumined. But as the sun sank to rest and the towers and spires grew dim and gray in the deepening twilight, she shivered and said:

"'Let us go in, mother, the balcony is so high it makes me dizzy, I seem to feel myself falling, falling to the pavement below.'

"'You are tired and nervous my child,' said the

mother. 'Come in and rest.'

"As they entered the room, Blossom threw herself upon the couch and said, 'Now, mother, seat yourself in your easy-chair and talk to me about my father and mother, tell me the sweet story of their lives, beginning with my mother's childhood, tell it just as though I had never heard it before. Forget that it is Blossom to whom you are telling the story. This is my birthday, so you must humor my whim.'

"The mother sat silent for awhile, rocking to and fro and gazing into space, a delicate flush overspread her faded cheeks, a soft brilliancy flashed into her eyes and a smile of ineffable sweetness played about her pale lips.

"Blossom, looking into her face, exclaimed, 'Oh,

how beautiful you are!'

"'Thank you, darling, it was the sweet memories of the past reflected in my face.' Then she began

the story:

"'God sent but one child to Richard and me—your mother, our precious May. We named her May, because she was born on the first day of that flowery month. This one little ewe lamb was the joy, the pride of our hearts; she carried the May blossoms in her flower-like face; her eyes were like the violets, her hair like the yellow buttercups, and

her skin was like the pink and white star-flowers that grew in the mossy old woods back of the dear home where Richard brought me, a bride. How I loved the old homestead. Richard was born there: it had been in the family many years. The house was roomy and pleasant, standing upon a gentle slope facing the sunny south. The sloping lawn was like velvet, and the graveled walks were bordered with old-fashioned flowers, pinks, tulips, pansies and lilies-of-the-valley. Honeysuckle vines and wisteria clambered over the broad verandas, and the trellises were covered with climbing roses, and roses, pink, crimson and white, grew in profusion everywhere. Under the wide-spreading elms and sugar maples were rustic seats, and to the branches of the great elm in front of the house was fastened little May's swing. I often watched her swinging to and fro, out into the sunshine and back into the shade, her golden hair floating on the breeze. And oh, her sweet laughter! it was like the music of little silver bells. May being our only child, we could not bear to be separated from her, so she was educated at home with governesses and masters of music. She was very bright and studious; she loved her books, and she excelled in music; her touch was exquisite and her voice was perfection of melody. (You have her voice, my Blossom.) The happy years slipped away until May's nineteenth birthday had come. A merry group of young girls out on the lawn were celebrating the pleasant event; Richard and

I were seated upon the veranda watching them and talking with pride of the beauty and grace of our winsome May. 'We must have her portrait painted,' said Richard, 'by the great artist that has lately come to the city; we will go in to-morrow and visit his studio.'

- "'When Richard and I were married the city seemed far removed from the old homestead, but the growth of twenty-one years had brought it near to us. On clear, still days we could see the spires shining in the sunlight and hear the church bell faintly ringing.'
- "'The next afternoon found us in the studio of the great artist. His pictures of faces and figures were so life-like that we stood before them in silent wonderment. Richard had gone to speak with the artist in reference to the portrait. When they returned together, as soon as my eyes rested upon the young artist my heart went out to him, and I wished that God had given me a son like this young man."

"'Oh, tell me, mother,' interrupted Blossom, 'just how he looked at that first meeting.'"

"'Yes, dear. He was above medium height, lithe and slender; but one could see that his muscles were firm as steel; and there was much of firmness and much of gentleness in the fine, intellectual face. His complexion was pale, but healthy. The rich blood showed warm and red in the sensitive mouth beneath the black mustache, his hair was black and wavy, but his eyes were his

chief beauty. They were large and dark, the lids drooped slightly, and the lashes were very long. When I looked into his clear eyes, I knew that he had nothing to hide, and I caught an expression of yearning tenderness and unsatisfied longing, that you often see in women's eyes but seldom in the eyes of men. I was taking these observations while we talked of the portrait, and when he asked me if my daughter was with me, I called her. She was standing not far away, absorbed in a beautiful painting of a young girl reading her first loveletter, as she turned and came toward us, her cheeks were flushed and there was a dreamy look in her violet eyes I had never seen that expression upon her face before, and I her mother. who had known her for nineteen years startled at this new and exquisite loveliness day was warm and she wore a white muslin dress and a broad white hat with a wreath of wild roses, and a bunch of wild roses at her belt. When I presented her to the artist she looked into his face an instant, then dropped her eyes before his admiring gaze and a vivid blush overspread her face, even tinging her white throat with a delicate pink. I turned to him and caught the tender light in his dark eyes, and I knew the end from the beginning. For a moment, a jealous pang seized my mother heart, then I remembered that it was thus with Richard and me. We met, we loved, neither of us had loved before, and how perfect was our union. There were many sittings in the quiet studio, but

the portrait progressed but slowly. I was always there and often wondered if Sidney Waynne knew how closely I watched and studied him. I knew that May loved him, and long before the portrait was finished, I loved him as a son. And his worshipful love for May was almost pathetic in its unexpressed tenderness. But the time came when the portrait was nearly finished; I shall never forget the afternoon of that last sitting. The studio was very quiet and the light subdued. In the next room a linnet warbled sweetly in his gilded cage; Sidney worked nervously, retouching the picture, his eyes were wide and brilliant, and there was a dash of red in his cheeks. May was as lovely as a dream as she sat with downcast eyes, the color coming and going in her delicate face. Neither of them had spoken for a half-hour; when I heard him say: 'Please look up, Miss May,' and as she raised her love-lit eyes, he dropped his pallette and took a step toward her, then turning quickly, he came to me and said, eagerly: 'Mother, she loves me-will you give her to me?' I looked at May, her eyes were pleading for him, and I said: 'Come here, my darling,' and they knelt at my feet, and I laid my fond hands upon their heads and blessed their betrothal.'

"'I had not intended that May should be married for at least a year, but Sidney pleaded for a speedy marriage.'

"'When I tell you,' said he, 'what a lonely life I've had, I know you will not have the heart to

withhold from me even a part of my happiness.' and this was the story he told me:

"'His father was an American, and while traveling abroad, he met at Genoa a beautiful Italian girl, the daughter of an artist. It was love at first sight, he married her and brought her to America, and she died when Sidney was four years old, and two years later his father died. Then the sensitive, affectionate child was left to the care of a guardian-a man of strictest integrity but one who had no conception of the child's nature, ever craving for love and tenderness, He saw that the boy was well-fed, well-clothed, well-educated, and had the best moral training, and, by careful investment and judicions handling, he made the most of the small fortune that was left to Sidney by his father. In doing all of this, he believed that he had conscientiously performed his whole duty to the son of his friend.'

"'After I heard Sidney's story, his pleadings for a speedy marriage were not in vain. Although May said not a word, I knew his wish was hers, and then I remembered that I was just nineteen when I was married to Richard and our engagement was brief. So one fair morning in the dreamy month of September, they were married in the flower-decked parlors of the dear old house, where Richard brought me a happy bride, just twenty-one years ago that day. It was May's wish to be married on the anniversary of our marriage.

I was the way to have the

A lovelier bride, a nobler bridegroom never plighted their vows at any altar.'

"'When they were gone, how silent and lonely was the old house. That night Richard and I stood looking at the pictured face of our little girl, taken years ago, and as the dimpled face smiled down upon us, Richard said with a sigh, 'Is it possible that our little one is a woman now, and a wife? It seems but yesterday when I first looked into her baby face and now she is married and gone.' There are only two of us now, my wife, the same as when we commenced twenty-one years ago—the same and yet how different, for now we have with us the sweet memory of all these happy years.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

"Soon the first letter came from the absent ones, and after that there was one every day. I have always kept those letters, so full of their new-found happiness. When they returned, after several weeks' sojourn in the mountains, how I loved to feast my eyes upon their radiant faces and listen to the music of their happy voices, as I assisted them in fitting up their suite of rooms connected with the studio. The rooms were very pleasant, overlooking one of those little flowery parks that make the city so pleasant in the summer-time. The first year, full of happiness, passed away quickly; and the day following the anniversary of their marriage and ours, they sailed for Europe to be absent two years.

"'Now we are starting on our wedding tour,' said Sidney cheerfully, as we were taking our tearful farewells. And when they were gone, how fervently Richard and I prayed that the winds and the waves would be kind to the good ship that carried our loved ones across the sea, and when the first letter came, telling of their pleasant voyage and safe arrival on the other side, we sank upon our knees, thanking the kind Father for his watchful

care. Before they sailed, they promised to keep a journal, writing every day, and once a week we received these journal letters, as we called them. They were delightful letters, so full of the personality of our dear ones, vivid pen pictures of their everyday life. And, whether in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, or Switzerland, Sidney was always pursuing his beloved art, copying from the old masters or making sketches of the real people that they met in their travels, sketches for future working out in the studio at home. In the latter part of their second year abroad, Little Blossom was born at Genoa, the birthplace of Sidney's mother, and when she was two months old they returned to America. They reached home in time for the marriage anniversary, and, oh, the joy of that reunion, after two long years of separation! When I looked upon their dear faces once more, and held my darling May's own baby in my arms, my heart overflowed with praises of gratitude to the kind Father for his goodness and tender mercies to me and mine. Richard and I could talk of nothing else but May's baby.

"'It is more wonderful even than was ours,' said Richard.

"The child was named for me and for Sidney's mother, Ruth Inez; but she was such a sweet, tiny flower, that we always called her Little Blossom.

"Sidney and May brought with them from foreign lands, many rare and beautiful things. Rich tapestries, silken curtains, oriental rugs, costly vases, dainty fans, boxes of sandalwood and rare pieces of furniture of carved wood and inlaid work, and exquisite statuettes of purest marble, and wonderful old pottery and grotesque idols from China and Japan.

"The rich foreign things gave to their suite of rooms an air of oriental luxury. And even the old house had quite a new air, for many of these things were brought expressly for Richard and me, and had their places in odd corners and niches, and on mantels and tables.

"I must describe to you one room of the suite occupied by Sidney and May. It was a lofty inside room having no light except from the hall transoms. It had been used as a storeroom for trunks, and all sorts of odds and ends, but soon after they returned from Europe, May said:

"' Now, I have use for my dark room."

"She ordered the servants to clear and renovate the room, then by her direction the woodwork and floor was painted and varnished to resemble polished mahogany. The side-walls were tinted a soft amber, and the ceiling pale blue, and dividing the amber from the blue was a heavy scroll of dull red. Upon the floor were oriental rugs and the skins of animals, the tawny lion, the striped tiger, the spotted leopard and the white bear. The silken hangings were of rich oriental colors and designs, and there were piles of cushions covered with rich fabrics from the East. In one corner stood May's beautiful harp (while abroad she had learned to

handle it with skill), and near the harp was Sidney's zithern and guitar, the slender music-stands and a tall bronze lamp that shed a soft golden light, that met and mingled with the subdued crimson light from another lamp in a far corner, where, upon an easel, in the lamp's ruddy reflection, rested an exquisite painting in statuary, of May and the child. Against a background of velvet blackness, the forms stood out like purest marble. May's figure was draped, yet half revealed the slender and delicate outlines. In her arms she held the nude dimpled form of Little Blossom. Her graceful head was bent and her eyes fixed upon the child, and there rested upon her face an expression of ineffable tenderness. No profane eyes ever dwelt upon this picture, only those who had known her long and loved her well, beheld its matchless beauty.

"Above the grate, where a low fire was always burning, hung a picture of the Madonna and Child. It was a divine conception, and in these faces there was a faint resemblance to the mother and child upon the easel. In all of Sidney's paintings of fair women, there could be traced a likeness to his wife, his heart was so full of love for her, that it unconsciously manifested itself upon the canvas. Beside the grate stood a large antique vase, filled with sandalwood chips, and from the golden censer, ever swinging before the picture of the Madonna and Child, there arose a sweet incense from the smoking chips within. The censer was suspended from the ceiling by spiral wires, so fine as

to be undistinguishable in the subdued light of the shaded lamps, so as it gently swayed to and fro in mid-air, it seemed to be swung by invisible hands. Little Blossom was the darling of our hearts and the pet of the studio. When strangers asked her name, she would say:

"'My name is Rufe, I'se named for my mover, but dey calls me 'ittle Blossom (you never called me 'grandmother,' dear, it was always 'mother,' and Richard was 'father,' not 'grandfather,' and it pleased us that it should be that way, for whatever Little Blossom did was right). Oh, the happiness of those beautiful years! It was too perfect to last. God is good to his children; there is much of heaven on earth, but sooner or later sorrow comes to us all. How often I recall our last days of unclouded happiness; it was Blossom's eighth birthday, spent at the old homestead. We had invited a number of little friends to celebrate the glad event, and their parents came with them. The children were having a merry romp out under the old elm trees. It was a balmy day in July, the sky was softly blue, the birds were singing in the tree-tops, and the air was laden with the perfume of the roses. Toward evening the children wandered off to the grove behind the house; near the grove was a lake, and Blossom carried some crackers to feed the fishes. They were very tame, coming close to the bank and leaping out of the water to catch the crumbs that were thrown to them. I sent one of the servants to look after the

children, for fear of an accident. A half hour later she came screaming to the house, and said that one of the little girls had fallen into the lake. When we reached the bank we saw a little form struggling in the water. Richard threw off his coat and sprang into the water, and soon succeeded in rescuing the little one. At first we thought she was dead, but when Richard assured the frantic mother that there was life, she became calm and worked with Richard as none but a mother can work, but it was a long time before the child was restored to consciousness. Richard, in caring for the child, forgot himself; but I did not forget him, my heart was full of anxiety for him, for I knew that the water of the lake was very cold, as it was fed by subterranean springs. As soon as it was possible for Richard to leave the child I hurried him away to change his clothes. I saw that he was shivering, and his hands were like ice, but he made light of it, and said that he would be all right when he had changed his wet garments for dry ones. But that night he had a chill and the next morning another, and he could not speak above a whisper. By noon he had a high fever, and the physicians pronounced it pneumonia. I had never seen him sick before, and oh, how heavy was my heart! I felt that he would die. Everything of nursing and medical skill was done to save that precious life. May, Sidney and I stood over him, night and day, and I prayed without ceasing, but it was all in vain. God's ways are not our ways. Just before he died, after bidding our dear ones farewell, he drew me close to him, and said:

"'Let your grief, my dear wife, be tempered with thankfulness to the kind Father who has spared us to each other for more than thirty years, thirty long, sweet, perfect years and now I leave you to the loving care of our children. Farewell, sweet wife, this parting is only for a little while, then a blessed eternity together.' As he ceased speaking he closed his eyes wearily and without a struggle, all was ended. And we laid him to rest in beautiful Greenwood, now the most sacred spot on earth to me.

" I will not dwell upon the grief and loneliness of the days that followed. My dear ones buried their own sorrow and gave to me every comfort of loving thoughtfulness and tender care. After this affliction we were always together. I spent the most of my time with them in the city. They would not allow me to stay at the old homestead unless Blossom was with me. Oh, what a comfort she was to me in those days, so bird-like and merry and yet so serious and womanly. During the four uneventful years that followed, time had somewhat softened our grief, but a new and overwhelming sorrow awaited us. For weeks May had not been quite well, she was pale and listless and when Sidney consulted a physician, he gave her a tonic, said it was nothing serious and she would soon be herself again. But she did not improve, was feverish and restless at night and one morning she was unable to leave her bed. When the physician came, he pronounced it typhoid fever, but said it was not a severe attack and he would have the fever broken in a few days, but he did not succeed in breaking the fever so it ran its course of twenty-one days. The fever, was always on, but never high. She was seldom delirious and suffered but little pain. The physician came very often, but always said that she was doing nicely; we were anxious but not alarmed. When the fever left her she lay very quiet all the afternoon but always awake and following us with her eyes and smiling so sweetly; she did not attempt to talk, only once she said to Sidney, 'Now the fever is gone, I shall soon be well again.'

"The doctor came at sundown, looked at her and said to me, 'increase the stimulant, give it every half hour and double the amount.'

"Before nine o'clock, he returned and said, 'I will stay with you to-night, for a patient needs to be watched closely at this crisis, she should sleep but in her weak condition, I dare not give her an opiate.'

"As he looked at her, I saw that his face was troubled and terror seized my heart, turning me cold and faint. He saw my sudden pallor and said cheerfully, 'What she needs now is a long, refreshing sleep,' then turning to Blossom, he said, 'kiss your mamma good-night, little girl, and go to bed. And you, Mr. Waynne, lie down on the couch, I will rest in the adjoining room, we will turn the

lamp low and leave the mother to watch. I think when all is quiet our patient will sleep.'

"When Blossom kissed her mamma good-night, she smiled so lovingly into her face and said, 'Mamma's own sweet darling,' and Blossom never heard her voice again. She slept fitfully through the night. Occasionally the doctor would come in and look at her and tell me to increase the stimulant and once, when Sidney had left the room for a moment, I said to him, 'Tell me the truth, doctor,' he shook his head sadly and said, 'She may live until morning.'

"I tried to tell Sidney, but could not. Just as the dawn was breaking, she opened her eyes and called, 'Mother, mother, father is here and I am going away with him to a beautiful land. Kiss me good-by.' I held her in my arms a moment, kissing the dear face, then she called, 'Sidney, Sidney, kiss me, dearest.' As he kissed her, her eyes closed and her head fell against his breast. He clasped the loved form in his arms, calling her name frantically. The doctor, though familiar with scenes like this, was moved to tears by Sidney's terrible grief, but he gently loosened his arms and laid the white form reverently upon the pillow and said, 'Be quiet, my brother, your wife is dead.'

"We laid our loved one beside Richard, in beautiful Greenwood. Sidney never recovered from the sudden shock of May's death; his reason was dethroned and remained that way until the end. He lost all knowledge of her death and was ever searching for her. He was gentle and harmless and clung to me like a child and could never bear to have Blossom out of his sight. How often, at my door, in the stillness of the night, have I heard his voice calling to me out of the darkness, 'Mother! mother! are you awake?'

"And I would answer, 'Yes, my son."

"Then he would say, in frightened tones, 'May is gone, I cannot find her.'

"Then I would go out, and taking his cold hand in mine, lead him back to his room and talk to him soothingly for awhile, telling him that May was safe in a beautiful land not far away; that she loved us and was waiting for us there and that by and by we would go to her never to be separated again. Then he would ask so piteously, 'Will it be very long, mother?' and I would answer, 'No, my boy, it will only be a little while.'

"I knew that, for him, the separation would not be long, as he was growing thinner and paler each day, scarcely eating or sleeping and resting not from his unwearied search for the lost one.

"After May's death I gave up the studio and the dear rooms so full of tender associations, and removed everything to the old homestead, excepting a few pictures that I left for sale, needing the money that they might bring. Before the year ended there was another newly made grave beside May's, in beautiful Greenwood, and just Little Blossom and I were left to each other. A few months later a new misfortune came to us. One evening

when Blossom and I returned from the city, where I had been to look after the sale of the few remaining pictures, we found the old homestead in ashes. No one could tell how it happened, the servants had only been able to save a few things, as the upper part of the house was in flames before they discovered it. Blossom and I stood under the blackened elms and wept bitter tears for the dear old home. I thought that I had insurance but found that it had expired a few days before the fire. Now I began to fear poverty, I had but little money and the pictures were nearly all sold. A short time after Richard's death the bank failed that contained nearly all of my money. But Sidney said, 'Never mind, mother dear, I, with my brush can make all the money we need.'

"I decided to sell the ground where the old house stood, as I had no money for rebuilding. Not knowing its value, I sold it for much less than its worth. Blossom and I went to the city, where we lived quite cosily in three little rented rooms furnished with the few things that the fire had left us. I tried to keep the little money we had, but the lace that I could sell would not keep the wolf from the door, so it dwindled away until all was gone and one day Blossom and I started out to hunt cheaper lodgings."

"'And here we are,' exclaimed Blossom, springing from the couch and throwing her arms around the grandmother; 'here we are safe and sound, high and dry and we still have each other.' "The soft cheek she pressed against the faded one was wet with tears, but the voice was as cheerful as a bird's in spring-time. The times grew better for Blossom and the grandmother; Blossom had found a buyer for her pictures who understood something of their value and paid a reasonable price for them, and when Blossom told of her good fortune to the people of the house, she added gleefully, 'Perhaps, after all, mother and I will not have to move out on the roof next year.'

"It had been Blossom's habit ever since they came to live on the little back street to sing for the people every evening before she retired; when she saw how hard their lives were and how few their joys, her tender heart was touched with compassion for them, forgetting her own misfortunes. It was her delight to give them the pleasure of listening to her beautiful voice and the sweet notes of her guitar. Summer evenings all the people in the neighborhood, at a certain hour, gathered below her balcony to listen to her bird-like voice, the good-night song was always a hymn. When the nights grew cold the people assembled in the broad hall and on the various landings standing. with upturned faces, their eyes fixed lovingly upon Little Blossom, pouring out the sweetness of her soul in these goodnight hymns. The first winter had passed since their removal to the upper floor and one evening in the early spring-time, as Blossom upon the balcony was singing to the people below, a man on horseback, in the street beyond, hearing her voice,

listened for a moment until he located the music, then turning his horse, rode into the narrow street and slowly traversed its length, listening to the song and looking with admiration at the girlish form transfigured in the moonlight. As the stranger was leaving the street, he met Jimmy hastening to join those beneath the balcony; the man stopped him and asked, 'Who is the girl singing in yonder balcony?'

"'Why, that is Little Blossom,' answered Jimmy.

"'Little Blossom,' repeated the man, 'that sounds very romantic, but hasn't she any other name?'

"Well, I reckon she has,' answered Jimmy, 'but I'm not sure.'

"'When I ask you to-morrow night, right here, on this corner, where you will be waiting for me, see to it that you do know.' Then throwing Jimmy several pieces of silver he was gone.

"Jimmy gathered up the money and looked at it with wide eyes; he had never been so rich before and he immediately began building air castles for Little Blossom.

"'That is a way-up fellow,' said Jimmy to himself, 'I can tell by his looks and I am sure that he is a fine fellow and not a bit stingy and he must be awful rich?' jingling the silver in his hand, 'and he is going to fall in love with Little Blossom and marry her and she will live in a big mansion on Fifth Avenue; ride in her own carriage and have a coachman in a green coat and stove pipe hat, all shiny and she will have silks and velvets and diamonds and furs in the winter. Miss Blossom is the handsomest girl in this city and she has no business living in an old tumble-down house on a back street with common folks, but I don't know what we will do without her. Perhaps I will be her coachman some day, when I get to be a man and that won't be long, the way I'm growing.'

- "Now Jimmy had joined the group before the old house and the stranger was forgotten, as he listened to Blossom's good-night hymn.
- "As the spring days lengthened into summer, there was a change in Little Blossom, the mother noticed it with anxiety. At times she was radiant, with flushed cheeks and eyes brilliant as stars and she would sing like a bird from morning till night; at other times she was pale and silent with a troubled look in her sweet brown eyes. To the mother she was more tenderly affectionate than ever and yet she felt that something had come between them; when she spoke of the change to Blossom, she would say:
 - "'It is nothing, mother; it is nothing."
- "But one day, she said with a bright smile and a blush, 'You will know very soon, mother dear, what has changed me, I should not have kept my secret from you so long, but you will forgive me when I tell you all."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BETRAYED AND FORSAKEN.

"THE grandmother said nothing more for several days but her heart was troubled; and when she again saw Blossom pale and nervous with that strange look in her eyes, she put her arms around her and said, 'Little one, it is not right that you should have secrets from your mother, tell me, child, what has changed you so, it breaks my heart to have you withhold your confidence from me.'

"Then Little Blossom, burst into tears and said between her sobs, 'Oh, forgive me, mother; forgive me! he made me promise to keep the secret, but said that he would come and tell you all and ask you to give him Little Blossom; but oh, he is so long in coming and my heart is so heavy; it has no rest, it is either throbbing wildly with joy or beating heavily with pain, because he comes not as he promised. Do you understand me, mother? I love him as you loved father and as mamma loved papa and I am sure that he loves me as father and papa loved you and mamma; he has told me so many times and has made so many sacred promises. We are to be married in September, on the anniversary of your marriage and mamma's. I

wished it to be that way and he is not unwilling, but the time is drawing near and he should have told you long ago.'

"'But, who is this man, my child,' asked the mother.

"'It is the man who passed through our street on horseback one moonlight evening in the early spring, when I was singing on the balcony and he says that he loved me then, before he knew my name; and I met him soon after in Central Park. Don't you remember, one day last spring, when I went to the park with Jimmy Dolan? You know the blessed boy had earned a little money and could not be happy unless he spent some of it on Miss Blossom, taking her to the park? It was a beautiful day, I was sitting alone in a shady nook; Jimmy was a little way off looking at the swans when Arthur came and spoke to me; he was so noble-looking and so respectful and so much older than I, that it did not seem wrong to listen to him and then he was very frank, telling me that he had thought of me continually since that night when he heard me singing on the balcony and before we parted, he told me that he loved me (you know my papa loved mamma as soon as he looked into her face) and he planned another meeting and in the few hours that we were together my heart had gone out to him; and I not only promised to meet him again, but to keep our meeting a secret for awhile, but I told him that I would not come without Jimmy and he answered quickly, 'Bring him by all means.'

After that, whenever I went to sell my pictures, he would meet me and give me long drives behind his snow-white horses or he would take me to art galleries, concert halls, museums and to elegant cafés for lunch; or we would wander through the parks and he was always talking of our future, our wedding tour abroad, where we would visit all the places that papa and mamma visited while there, and he talked of our home life, of the beautiful home that you would share with us. While with him I was in heaven; he had the power to make me forget everything but him, but when away from him it was not so, my heart was often troubled. I was ever urging him to come and see you and he always promised to come very soon. To-night I shall write and tell him that I have told you all, then I know that he will come. He thought it was so sweet to keep the secret as long as possible, but now it is no longer a secret. I wish I had told you long ago. Can you forgive me, mother, dear?'

- "'Yes, my child, it is easy to forgive you, you are so young and know so little of the world, but I will never forgive him, if he is untrue to you, neither will God forgive him.'
- "'Oh, mother! he loves me and could not be untrue to me after all his sacred promises.'
- "That night Little Blossom sent her letter, a sweet letter, full of perfect trust and containing no reproaches. She told him that the mother now

shared their secret, and asked him to come and see her on the following Sabbath day.

"Now that Blossom had opened her heart to the mother, and the letter was gone, her heart was light once more and she filled the old house with music and sunshine.

"Saturday night had come; the little sittingroom was very neat and pleasant, the mother was
preparing the frugal meal, Blossom had spread the
snowy cloth on the little round table and placed
upon it a few pieces of dainty china, the relics of
former days. A little lute was playing in her
heart and her lips caught the sweet love notes and
warbled them forth as she performed her simple
duties. Her song was interrupted by a voice just
outside the open door, calling 'Miss Blossom!'
very softly. It was Jimmy; and as she stepped
out into the hall he handed her a letter. She
pressed his hand and said:

"'Thank you, little friend, Blossom will always remember you.' And as she heard the voice of her grandmother calling her to tea, she slipped the precious letter into her bosom. It lay over her heart and oh, how happy she was to feel it there as she sipped her tea and chatted blythely with the mother. It was happiness enough for the present to know she had the letter, she would not read it until the mother retired. It was not a heavy letter, and she pictured to herself its contents, just a few lines telling her at what hour they might expect him the next day; then again, and for the

hundredth time, she pictured the meeting between her loved ones, how proud and happy she would be to see them so pleased with each other, Then her mind wandered on and on through flowery labyrinths of the blissful future. She was brought back to the present by the voice of the grandmother, saying:

"'I believe I will retire early to-night, dear, and try to sleep off the headache that is threatening me.'

"'That is right, mother dear, you must not have the headache, to-morrow,' blushing rosily, then throwing her arms around her mother's neck, and pressing her cheeks to hers, she said: 'Oh, mother, I am so happy to-night, so happy.'

"The mother held the sweet form tightly pressed to her heart for a moment, then said brokenly, 'May God grant that you will always be happy, my little one,' then kissing her fondly, she said good-night, and left her alone with her letter.

"She dropped into the mother's arm-chair and drew the letter from her bosom and kissed it, her cheeks were red, and a bright smile of expectancy played around her mouth, as she eagerly tore open the envelope. She had only read a few lines when the color left her cheeks, and when she had finished the brief letter, her face was ghastly white. For hours she sat rigid in her chair without moving, the fatal letter crushed in her little cold hands and a look of hopeless agony in her wide brown eyes. When the clock struck three she arose, left her chair and staggering across the room, seated

herself at the secretary and wrote a few lines with trembling hands, placed it in an envelope and sealed it, then crept shivering to her narrow bed. Her lips moved continually but only God heard the whispered words, 'Betrayed and forsaken, betrayed and forsaken.'

- "The next morning when the mother entered the sitting-room, she found Blossom sleeping heavily, and noted with alarm the deathly whiteness of her face. She noiselessly prepared the simple breakfast. And when Blossom awoke, the mother was sitting by the bed looking anxiously into her pale face, she kissed her and asked, 'Are you sick, my child'
- "'Yes, my head aches, feel how it throbs, and I have a pain here,' placing her hand over her heart.
- "'You must lie still,' said the mother, 'and I will bring you some tea.'
- "She drank the tea but refused the food that was offered her. She lay quiet until noon, then arose and put on her dainty white wrapper, and lay upon the couch all the afternoon. The mother had no suspicion that it was anything but physical weakness. How could it be anything else? The night before she was as blythe as a bird, it was just a headache and pain in her chest, she had been painting too steadily.
- "'She shall paint no more for a week,' said the grandmother to herself.
 - "At noon Blossom drank her coffee but ate no

dinner, at night she drank her tea, but ate no supper. When the mother expressed anxiety, she would say:

- "'Don't worry, mother dear, I shall be well tomorrow.
- "While the mother was clearing the table, Blossom walked out into the hall and leaning over the balusters, she called Jimmy, and he came bounding up the stairs, and as soon as he saw her face, he said:
 - "'Oh, Miss Blossom, you are sick.'
- "'I am not well to-day,' she answered, then taking Jimmy's hand in hers, she looked long and earnestly into his honest blue eyes, and asked, 'Jimmy, do you love me?'
 - "' You know I do, Miss Blossom."
- "'Then promise me that you will never tell the secret that you have kept for me all of these months, promise me that whatever happens, you will keep my secret as long as you live. Now raise your hand, Jimmy, and promise.'
- "He raised his hand, and looking into Blossom's eyes, said solemnly, 'I promise never to tell the secret, never while I live, wild horses could not drag it from me.'
- "Then she gave him the note she had written the night before, and said, 'give it to him to-morrow,' then kissed his forehead and went back to her couch, where she lay quietly until nine o'clock, when the mother said, 'Blossom, our friends are waiting down in the hall for their good-night hymn.

I will tell them that you are sick and cannot sing to-night.'

"'If you please, mother,' but before she had spoken a word to the people below, Blossom stood beside her and said, 'I have never disappointed them and I will not to-night.'

"She clasped her hands together and raised her eyes to heaven and began singing in a tremulous voice:

"Jesus lover of my soul,

Let me to Thy bosom fly,

While the nearer waters roll,

While the tempest still is high.

"Here there was a pause and every face below was upraised to the white, girlish form, and as they listened breathlessly, she burst forth in pleading tones:

"Hide me, oh, my Saviour, hide!

Till the storm of life is past,

Safe into the haven guide,

Oh, receive my soul at last.

"Again she paused, and the women began sobbing in the hall below, when she heard their sobs, she looked down upon them and they never forgot that tender, loving look. As she began singing again, there were tears in her eyes:

"Other refuge have I none;
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;—

"Then raising her voice in piteous supplication:

"Leave, oh, leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.
All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing."

"While the last notes quivered in the air she said 'good-night' and was gone. The grandmother was weeping, but Blossom's eyes were dry, and as she wiped the mother's cheeks, she said tenderly, 'don't cry, mother, dear, I will be well and happy to-morrow,' then they kissed each other and separated for the night.

"For hours Blossom sat pale and silent in the mother's great chair but finally she arose, drew the fatal letter from her bosom and held it in the flame of the lamp until it was consumed. Then for a long time she stood before the portrait of her father and mother, gazing tearfully into their pictured faces, while she repeated these words o'er and o'er.

"'Papa, mamma, do you still love your Little Blossom? Your poor little girl, betrayed and forsaken, betrayed and forsaken?'

"All day, as she lay upon the couch, her eyes had rested almost continually upon the pictures of the Madonna and the Magdalene hanging over the mantel, and now she stood before them, her hands raised in supplication, while in agonized tones she cried:

- "'O mother of Christ! Oh, Magdalene, can you see and pity poor Little Blossom to-night? Magdalene, of whom so much was forgiven, stand close to the gate and lead your little sister to the pitying Christ. Oh! I am so weary, so weary of this aching heart; I ask not for a jeweled crown, or a mansion white and fair, but only to rest, to rest in His loving arms.'
- "With one last despairing look at the pictured faces on the wall, she dragged herself wearily to the open window and stepped out upon the balcony; the night was cool and calm, far out in the city a bell was tolling the midnight hour. At the last stroke of the bell, she raised her eyes to the silent stars and cried:
- "'Oh, Father! forgive him, forgive him, and forgive and receive the spirit of your erring child.'
- "Then she leaned far out over the balcony, there was a low cry of terror, a flutter of white in the air, a dull thud upon the pavement below and all was ended here for Little Blossom.
- "There are two more graves in beautiful Greenwood, the graves of Little Blossom and the grandmother.
- "A man of wealth and influence in the great city, one who lives in a gilded palace, a mockery of home, because love dwells not there, often wends his way to Greenwood and lays costly flowers upon the grave of Little Blossom; and standing there, with grim Remorse, the companion that never leaves him, in his heart he knows that all of

love and sweetness that had ever come into his life is buried in the grave at his feet. And wherever he turns his guilty eyes there ever appears before him this one word 'MURDERER' in letters of blood.

"There are others who come with loving hearts, bringing their offerings of simple flowers, they are the people from the narrow street where Little Blossom and the grandmother lived and died. They stand reverently before the graves and talk in subdued voices of their beautiful lives and of their tragic deaths.

"Was it not tragic that the grandmother should die of a broken heart, when she looked upon the dead form of Little Blossom? The patient, suffering heart could endure no more of sorrow. And they talk of Jimmy, who pined away and died of grief for Little Blossom. They never knew that it was not grief alone that killed Jimmy, but that terrible secret gnawing at his tender heart. None but he on the little street, ever dreamed that Blossom's death was not an accident and poor Jimmy exaggerated his part in the bringing about of the tragedy. Could he have shared the secret with his mother he would not have died, but bearing the burden of it alone wore his life away.

"One day, a little girl, standing by the graves, said softly:

"' How surprised Little Blossom must have been, when the grandmother came and took her by the hand and led her through the white gate into the

white city and how pleased she must have been when Jimmy came and said, 'I loved you so much, Little Blossom, that I could not stay away from you any longer.'

"And still they come and go, the guilty man from his palace and the loving friends from the little back street. The weeping willow is still waving over their graves, the soft rustling of the leaves, the sighing of the breezes mingling with the song of the birds, is a sweet requiem chanted over the forms sleeping so peacefully side by side under the grassy mounds."

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE MORNING.

"How beautiful the garden is, this morning," said Hope as she and Miriam wandered along the shady paths.

"Yes, but I have no fountains," said Miriam regretfully, "all traces are lost of the fountains described in my precious old manuscript, as having once belonged to the chateau. No garden is complete without a fountain. How well I remember the beautiful fountain called Egeria in the Fields Elysian. In the centre of the fountain, gleaming through silvery spray, is the sculptured form, in purest marble, of the nymph Egeria, who for love of King Nurma pined away, weeping until she was changed into a fountain. I wish I were a fountain at the foot of the Shining Heights in the Fields Elysian."

"If you were a fountain," said Hope, "I would sit beside you night and day weeping my life away to tears that would flow and mingle with the bright waters that once were Miriam."

"Then the girls kissed each other, laughing softly, but there were tears in Miriam's eyes and as they strolled along, she sang in subdued tones, this pathetic little song:

"In my sweet dream I saw his face last night.
In his dear eyes there beamed a tender light.
I murmured, "Love without you life is drear;"
Then on his cheek there fell a precious tear—
A little priceless tear.

This little tear washed all my grief away;
And changed my darkness into perfect day;
Dispelled the gloom and filled my heart with cheer
As on his cheek, I saw that pearly tear—
That little priceless tear.

This wondrous tear, that fell from his dear eyes,
Swept open wide the gates of paradise.
No gem of earth, to me was half so dear,
Nor pearl of ocean as that one bright tear—
That little priceless tear."

They were standing before the ruined chateau when Miriam finished her song.

"And Hope said, "One never grows tired of these picturesque ruins. Nature is a true artist, look how gracefully she drapes her vines over the broken columns! and how artistic is that gray old arch, with its portieres of ivy-fringed with tendrils of delicate green. See how she has trained her vines over the crumbling walls and all the fallen stones are imbedded in green turf and overspread with velvet mosses."

"Yes," answered Miriam, "nature has been very kind to the old chateau. These ruins have a mystic charm for me. I believe that the spirits of my ancestors haunt this familiar spot. How often, in

the stillness of moonlit nights, when the veil was lifted from my spiritual eyes, have I seen shadowy forms flitting among the ruins of the old chateau; and how often in the twilight hour, when seated in the midst of the ruins upon the broken stairway, my spiritual ears have been attuned to catch faint strains of music, and to hear whispering voices all around me. And one voice so caressing, I believe, is the spirit-voice of my mother speaking to her lonely child. The mother whose living voice I never heard; the sweet mother who gave her life for mine."

"Come, Miriam," interrupted Hope, "let's go out into the sunshine. I am afraid that a whole troop of ghosts will appear to us here in the broad daylight; I am not fond of ghosts."

Then Miriam laughed and said, "I love to have them whisper in my ears."

When the girls left the garden they took the narrow path that leads to the lake, and when they reached the shore, Hope seated herself upon the ground beneath a wide-spreading willow, and Miriam, half reclining upon the grassy slope at her feet, looked up into her dreamy face, and finally she asked:

- "Tell me, Hope, of what are you thinking?"
- "I was thinking of 'Pandora's Box.' "
- "But why of 'Pandora's Box '?"
- "Because in my dreams last night Morpheus brought me a veritable Pandora's Box, with only this difference: The evils that my box contained

destroyed each other, only one escaping, and in the bottom of the box was Joy instead of Hope."

Miriam was sitting upright now, her bright eyes fixed on Hope's face. "Morpheus is wise," said she. "He knew that you would share your treasure with Miriam, and he also knew that she had Hope ever at her side, but that Joy had forsaken her. Then sinking back on the turf, with a little sigh of satisfaction, she said, "Now I will listen to the dream."

PANDORA'S BOX.

"It was a perfect day and I had just returned from a stroll across the meadows, and as I entered my room in Miriam's tower, I saw a mysteriouslooking box standing upon the table. It was fastened securely with strong cords, and while untying the cords I discovered several small holes in the cover of the box. As with trembling fingers I raised the lid a few inches, two large red lizards escaped from the box and darted across the floor, hiding themselves in a fur rug. As I stood looking at the box, afraid to again raise the lid, it was slowly raised from the inside, and a pair of bright eyes peered out at me for an instant, then a strange little animal leaped out upon the floor, and springing upon a chair, he turned looking at me with sharp, inquisitive eyes. He was a little, sleek, brown creature, with a bushy tail, pointed ears standing erect, a sharp nose and a pair of bright eyes set close together, and those eyes fascinated me. They were sly and sinister in expression, and they seemed to say:

"'Will you have me for a friend or a foe?" While looking at this strange animal, I heard a fluttering sound in the box, and when I raised the lid, out flew a black bird and perched himself upon the window bracket near the ceiling, then folding his wings, he looked down with sombre eyes upon the animal in the chair beneath. While he, in turn, stood alert, showing his sharp white teeth as he looked at the bird with baleful eyes. Again from the box came the sound of fluttering wings. I cautiously raised the lid, when a white bird perched itself upon the edge of the box, ruffled its snowy plumage and burst into song, and such entrancing notes I had never heard before. But, suddenly, his song was changed to a cry of terror, and he dropped back into the box just as the black bird swooped down to destroy him. I bought a gilded cage for my white bird, a cage within a cage, so that nothing could harm him. I named him little Joy. I fed him with the daintiest food and hung his cage among the flowers in a sunny window, and day after day the wild sweet melody of his song made me forget the lizards hiding in the rugs, and the sly, sleek beast that ever watched the evil bird that brooded o'er my sunlit room. I could have killed these unwelcome guests or driven them away, but I would not, because they were sent to me with my singing bird. One day, as the lizards were darting from one rug to another, the black

bird swooped down, caught one of them and swallowed it, and barely escaped from the animal that sprang upon him, tearing the long quills from his tail. A few days later, the bird caught the other lizard, this time the animal was too quick for him. He fastened his teeth in the neck of the fluttering bird and leaped through the open window, and I saw them no more, But my white bird was still singing in his gilded cage, filling my heart with joy and my room with melody."

CHAPTER XX.

MIRIAM.

THE little tower still rears its vine-draped walls in the midst of the shady garden beside the ruins of the old chateau. The birds are still flitting through the open turrets, building their nests and singing their songs in the waving tree-tops. The lake, as of yore, reflects the azure by day, and the starry dome by night; and in the leafy aisles of the old forest can be heard the whispering voices. The daisy-starred meadows and purple hills are ever smiling in the sunlight, and the palms are still waving on the Shining Heights above the white castle enveloped in its silvery mists. The years are slipping by; cheerless years to Miriam, but for Hope, the sweet companion who never forsakes her. In the distance, from the window of her lonely tower, Miriam often sees, with tearful eyes, a once-loved form ever followed by the ghostly shadow. When the days are darkest, the strange bird, still perched above the picture of the Madonna, sings his sweetest songs to cheer her solitude. But there is a room within her heart that no ray of light, no word of cheer or strain of melody can reach. This room is the innermost sanctuary of the Holy of Holies of her heart. It

is called the throne-room. Its walls are of pearl, and its floor is inlaid with precious stones, but they sparkle not, and give forth no lustre in the darkness. No ray of light from the outside world can penetrate this room; but when the king was on his throne, the love-light in his jeweled eyes filled all the room with radiance. But the throne is empty now, and upon the floor lie the fragments of a shattered idol.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOPE'S VISION.

IT was not a vision of the night that Hope beheld from the western balcony, but a fair vision of the sunny morn. The sky was like sapphire, so radiantly blue. The dew-drops lay like gems upon the flowers, the foliage and the velvet lawn. The trees were full of little singing birds and down in the garden stood sweet Miriam; her white clinging garments seemed to caress her graceful form. She was gazing down the broad white road. Again she wandered with her lover through the mazy windings of the park. She heard the music of his voice once more; she saw the fountains playing in the sunlight; she scented the rare perfume of the flowers and the song of the oriole fell sweetly on her ears. The sad, sad days that followed, were forgotten. She lived again. As she stood there, lost in this fair vision of the past, Hope, from her balcony, saw a man walking slowly toward the tower, followed by a black shadow.

"Ah!" said she, "how large the shadow has grown since I saw him last."

As the man drew near, he saw Miriam standing with clasped hands, her enraptured face turned toward the Shining Heights, and as he stopped to

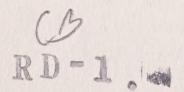
look at her, his proud face softened, the cynical expression was changed to infinite tenderness, and Hope, in her vision, could look into his soul and read his secret thoughts. First she saw all the falseness, the blackness of his life since his desertion of Miriam, and she saw the change that took place in his heart when he looked upon her pure face again. Suddenly he was revealed to himself; and saw his black soul in contrast to her white soul and saw his life in contrast to the pure life of the woman he had scorned and terrified at the revelation, he opened the gate, entered the garden and stood before Miriam, and his soul cried out to her:

"Oh, Miriam, Miriam, forgive! forgive! I am not worthy that even your shadow should fall across my yath. But your God, whom I have denied, hath said, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be made white as wool.' Oh, Miriam! I am not worthy to touch even the hem of your garment; but if God can forgive, cannot you for give, sweet Miriam?"

As he stood before her, pleading for forgiveness, her face, first pitiful, became illumined with a great and holy joy and the black shadow becoming luminous, enveloped their forms, hiding this reconciliation from mortal sight.

And Hope watched them as they left the garden and wandered hand in hand down the broad white road; and as they neared the park, Hope saw, standing on either side of the open gateway, two forms in shimmering white. It was Peace and Content. And she saw them following Miriam and her lover, not by the winding paths, but up the straight white path that leads to the mountain of Love's Consummation, And she watched them winding, winding, up, up the Shining Heights, until they were lost in the silvery mists that hung low upon the castle walls.

THE END.



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Miriam's Tower

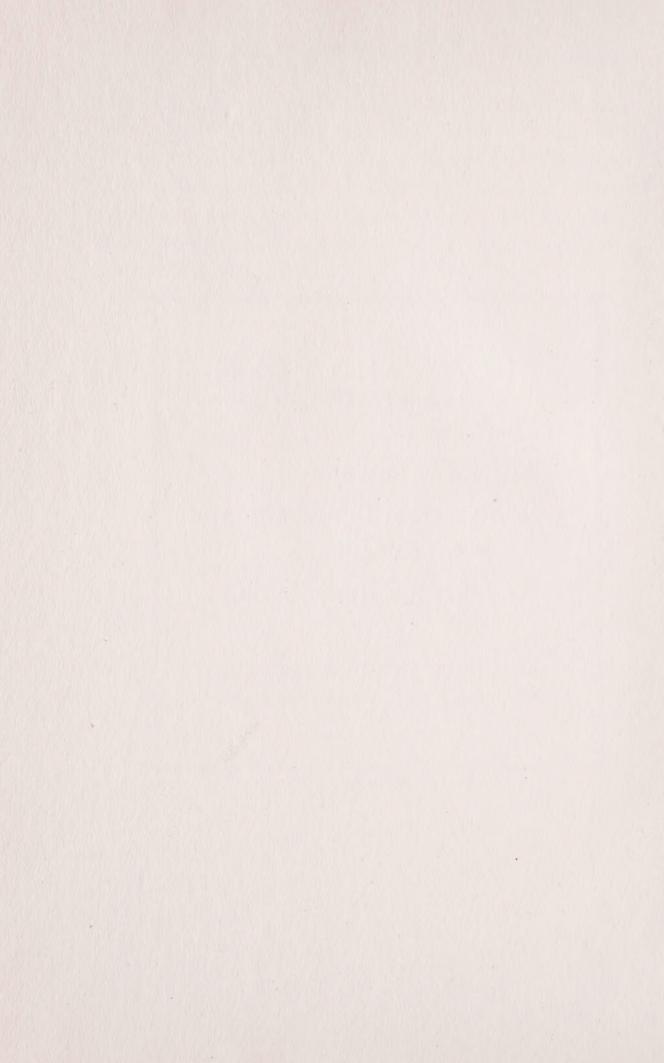
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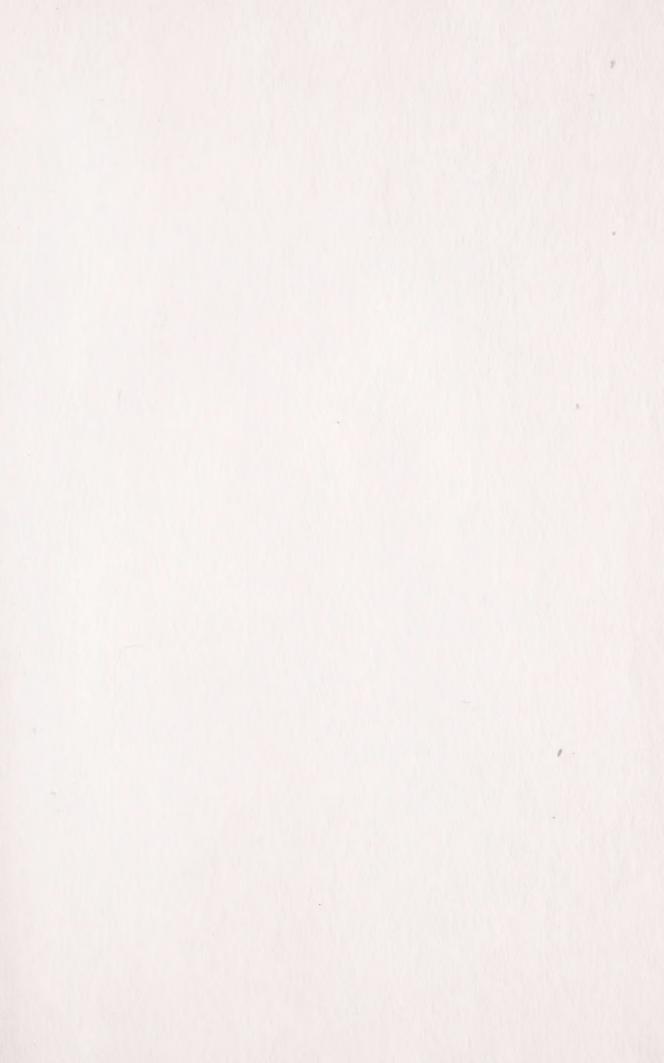
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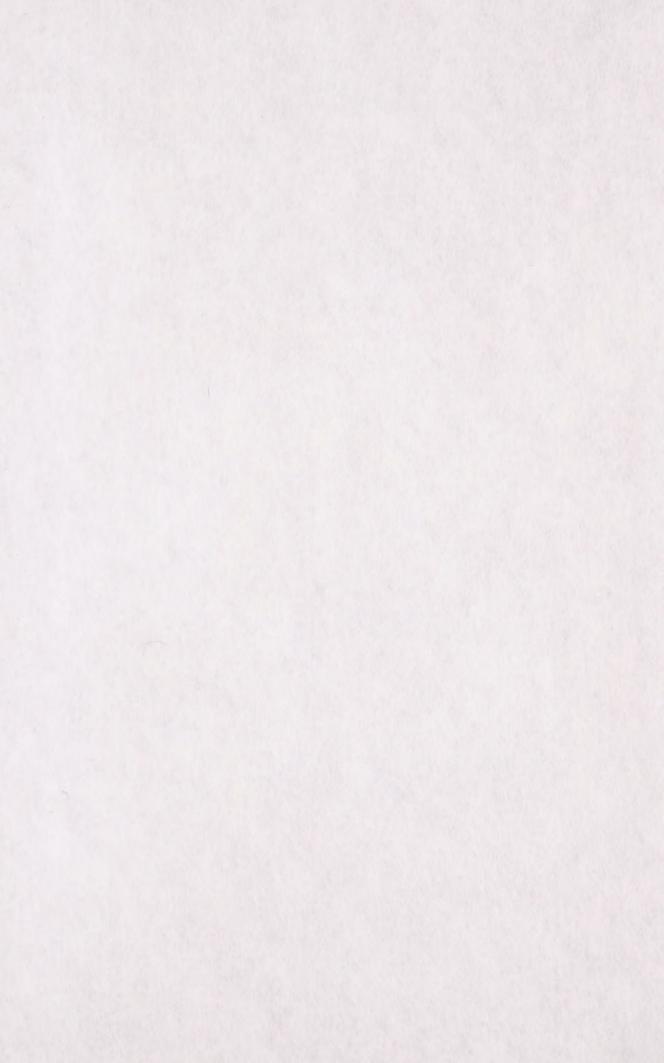
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